

SANITARIUM

Bringing you the Best in Horror Fiction, Dark Verse and Macabre Entertainment

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Liam C

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Jon Wheeler

Shelby A. Martinez

James Park

Jon M. James

Russell S. Archey

Joseph V. Danoski

Terry Miller

We Spend a Moment
with Barbie Wilde

#38



CONTENTS

ISSUE #38

HORROR FICTION

p. 6 A Man Wakes Up Any Morning
by Spencer Rhys Hughes

p. 17 Claymore Clara by Liam C

p. 21 Guilt Travels by Brandon Boudreaux

p. 35 Nightseed by Jon Wheeler

p. 45 The Watcher Through the Window
by Shelby A. Martinez

p. 52 Irrelevant by James Park

p. 57 Tears in the Gathering Mist
by Jon M. James

p. 66 Who Dwell Among Us
by Russell S. Archey

DARK VERSE

p. 78 The Dawn of Monsters
by Joseph V. Danoski

p. 81 She-Demon by Terry Miller



Welcome to the Sanitarium

If this is your first visit or your 38th, we welcome you and we hope you enjoy your stay. We have great stories and featured to keep you entertained.

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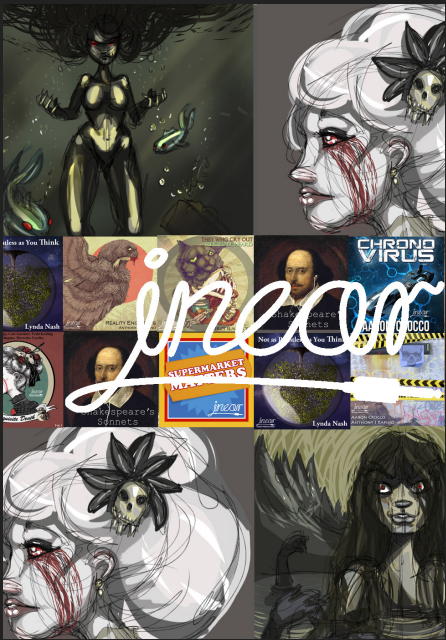
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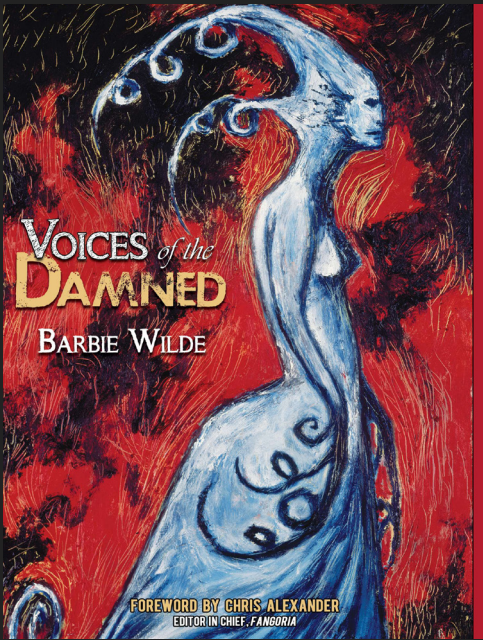
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86_
Horrify Me!



88_
In Ear Entertainment



Barbie Wilde

90_
The



ISSUE THIRTY EIGHT

Dear Reader,

First of I have to say Happy Halloween. It has been a great year so far for the horror community but as with highs there are always a few lows. It's around this time, as the leaves turn and the nights draw in, we take stock of the past few months as we hurtle towards the new year.

Overall I have to say it's been a good run up to Halloween for us, we have features great stories and our interviews are going from strength to strength – including this issues moment with Barbie Wild. I already have a list of interviewees that I want to pin down over the next 12 months covering all from stage to screen and everything in-between.

So I hope you all have a great Halloween and you enjoy the festivities.

Until next Issue.

Barry Skelhorn
Editor-in-Chief



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A Man Wakes Up Any
Morning

by Spencer Rhys Hughes

Physician: Dr. Roundtree
8245-AVD12

#61426

CASE #: 61426



A MAN WAKES UP ANY MORNING

BY SPENCER RHYS HUGHES

HE WOKE UP, AGAIN, to the same alarm as always: the static hiss of the radio underscoring the accentless newsman as he said, "...he went to the gun locker, opened it, and took out the rifle." He slapped the radio off before he heard the rest of the story and pushed himself up out of bed. Sarah shifted on the mattress next to him, an airy sigh slipping from her lips as she curled up in the covers. She never heard the newsman, no matter how many times he said the exact same thing. They'd had a fight about it, once. She always heard a rock song, from Oceanrest Rock & Blues Radio. The same song, every time...something by Nine Inch Nails, but he couldn't remember the title. He only ever heard the news report, the same news report, over and over again.

"Steve?" Sarah's voice was sleepy-soft.

"Yeah?" he asked, pretending not to know the question. Pretending not to have heard it every day for as long as he could remember, going back more days than he had any reason to keep counting.

"Could you make breakfast for the kids? I had a late night."

"Sure."

The form of her was invisible beneath the sheets, but he knew she smiled. It was a small smile, no teeth

showing. He'd maneuvered a glance at it on one of the hundreds of days that were all exactly alike. Within minutes, she'd be back in the depths of sleep.

He scrambled eggs in the frying pan. They spat oil and sputtered as he chopped at them with the spatula. The dog, Shep, wove between his legs excitedly, as if expecting a helping herself. He stared at the pan, listening to the sound under the sizzling eggs. Radio static, in crescendo. The clock on the stove blinked to 7:35 AM.

The television flickered on in the living room. The news anchor sounded exactly the same as the Radio Man, sounded exactly the same as his boss, sounded exactly the same as how many other people he'd met living the same day over for months on end. The anchor leaned toward the camera, "His wife, author Sarah Clarke, was still sleeping when the slaughter began."

He walked over to the set and turned it off. He stared at the blank screen until the smell of burning eggs brought him back to the stove. He swore he saw something move behind the black veil of the dead screen, but he could never make it out.

He didn't remember buying the gun. He remembered the code to the safe, the number he punched into the keypad to unlock it, but he didn't actually remember buying the thing. It was as if it had always been there, waiting, whispering in his dreams.

The safe was in the closet of their bedroom, on the opposite side of the house from the twins. He remembered it being there when he brought them all home from the hospital. Had it been there when they'd moved in? Had it been there when they bought the house and he carried Sarah over the threshold like a second wedding?

The question hurt his head. He walked back to the kitchen, closing the door quietly behind him.

Amy was up, first. She came out of her room so fast she would've crashed right into the wall if he hadn't been there to catch her. He'd learned that from the first few times the day repeated: same time, every morning, Amy careened out of the room fast as a bullet right into the wall. Being there to catch her saved him twenty minutes of crying. It saved her a nasty knot on the side of her head, too.

"Watch it there, kiddo," he said, smiling down at her.

She was very small and young and knew little about pain.

She pulled herself out of his hands and ran toward the kitchen table. "You're coming to the play tomorrow!" – not a question, but a statement. Amy had a role in the school play, and had been increasingly excited about it during the lead up. She was bubbling over. Except tomorrow never seemed to come. All her enthusiasm was trapped in the present, imprisoned in the same endless morning.

"You bet," he whispered back, knowing she couldn't hear him.

Charlie came out of the room next, rubbing his eyes. "I don't wanna go."

Steve reached down and ruffled his son's dirty blond hair. "Too bad, Chuckie man."

"It's a stupid play."

"It'll only be a little while. You'll be fine."

Charlie grumbled his way into the kitchen and sat down at the table. He poured too much ketchup on his eggs.

He brought them both a glass of milk and half of an English muffin with peanut butter and jelly. It was what they had in the house: milk, eggs, English muffins, peanut butter, jelly, and four cans of tuna. Groceries had been tight. Everything had been tight since they'd discovered they were having fraternal twins instead of a single child. It didn't help that Sarah hadn't had a successful book in four years. Or any book at all. A sales job in telecomm wasn't enough to feed a family of four.

The debt had worried him until the calendar stopped moving. Now it seemed like a funny joke. If a collector called, he would cheerily give them all the appropriate information and hang up the phone, knowing nary a dime would go missing from it. Another of the fringe benefits of not having a future.

"Never put off till tomorrow," he muttered to himself, watching his children eat. It was a joke he'd made, before. It wasn't funny and it wasn't aging well, either.

"You'll break," the dog had the Radio Man's voice. Its mouth didn't move, but Steve could hear it in his head. "They all break, eventually. One way or another. What do you think you have in you? A couple more months, maybe a year? How long can you make the same breakfast every morning?"

He glared down at the dog and found it jumping up and down around the kitchen table. Charlie slipped it a palm-full of egg and ruffled its ears. The animal glanced back at Steve with mischief in its eyes. Charlie loved the dog, of course. Charlie couldn't hear it whisper in his head.

How many times had he done this? How long had he fought? How many ways could he avoid doing it? How many times could he wake up in the same bed and hear the same news report and decide not to let it happen? Over. He just wanted it to be over.

The bus picked the kids up a few minutes late. 8:39 instead of 8:30. Of course, after the first few times Steve had just started taking them out to the curb at 8:35ish. He waved them aboard the yellow bus and watched it drive away.

There was one thing he hadn't tried, yet, but he didn't want the kids to be home if it worked.

Sarah was still sleeping when he tip-toed back into the bedroom. He went to the gun locker, opened it, and took out the rifle. It was a 30.06 and held five bullets. He loaded it up and listened to the safe sing static in his ears. It was always static. Static and the radio voice, out of every pore of the world. The dog had the voice. The stray cat had the voice. The birds had the voice. The mouse scurrying across the sidewalk had the voice. He could hear the news report shivering beneath the earth's skin.

But problems do have solutions.

He left the bedroom with the gun and walked out to the backyard. It was a quiet neighborhood. The only sound was the pop and crackle of the thing living inside the air, the rustle of leaves scratching each other like record needles. He took a deep breath.

His teeth felt strange against the barrel, like biting into a piece of flint. It was cold and hard and it made his enamel itch. He closed his eyes and fumbled for the trigger with his thumb, awkwardly hunched over the gun. He tried to block out the gritty texture and the coppery taste of metal. He struggled not to gag. His thumb found the curved edge of the trigger, and he heard himself whimper.

He squeezed the trigger.

The radio man said, "He killed his son, first, splattering blood across scrambled eggs like watery ketchup" and Steve reached out and slammed his hand on the alarm clock. He rolled over and pulled Sarah close to him, feeling her body ease into his. She helped his lungs expand. The alarm clock turned back on. "His daughter tried to run away, screaming for her mother, but he shot her in the back of the throat before—"

He turned away from Sarah, grabbed the alarm clock, and wrenched it from the wall. He pushed himself out of bed and threw the clock on the floor, watching its plastic pieces break apart to reveal electronic guts. He picked up the remains and threw them down, again, watching them shatter and spin away from each other. The floor was covered in debris.

"What the hell are you doing?" Sarah sat up in bed.

Steve swallowed air to drown the fire in his chest. "I'm sick of it."

Sarah seemed small in the center of the mattress, caught in the whorl of sheets. Her voice seemed smaller still. "My parents said...if we have to..."

He shook his head at her, bull-like, "No. That's not—I'm not living in a basement with two kids, the dryer banging around all night, living behind walls we make out of shower curtains."

"Just until I finish the book."

He took a deep breath and started picking the shattered radio pieces up from the floor. "It's fine," he muttered. He bit his tongue to stop himself from talking about the news report, the Radio Man, the repeating day. She never believed him, anyway. "Keep writing. I'll figure it out at work. We'll figure it out."

He hadn't even gone to work for months. It seemed pointless, now.

"I'm sorry," he offered, dropping the radio innards into the bin at the foot of the bed. "Just...work stress. The boss. We haven't had a cost-of-living raise in years and...nevermind. I'm just sorry, okay?"

She nodded, not replying.

He could feel tears behind his eyes, trying to force their way out. "I'm so goddamned sorry."

"Come here," Sarah reached out with open arms, "let me hold you."

One day, to kill the monotony, he told the kids to skip school and go to the zoo with him. He snapped at Amy when she tried to turn on the car radio, smacked her hand harder than he wanted. She didn't cry, but she looked up at him with wide, scared eyes. The tape deck grinned at him, spat out a tape like a tongue. He grabbed it and threw it out the window, watching it shatter against the road behind them.

The day was muffled and distant inside his head. The kids jumped around and took photographs on disposable cameras, snapshots of big cats and exotic birds. Steve tried to keep his eyes on his feet, feeling the gaze of every animal branding his skin. Monkeys howled at him, teeth bared, "His daughter tried to run away! His daughter tried to run away!" Their laughter chattered in his head. One of them threw crap at him, spattering his slacks with their shitstain.

The kids got tired and grumpy and started to whine, so he took them to lunch at a cheap burger place down the road. His wallet was out of cash, so he paid on a credit card. The kids' faces got gross with condiments, their fingers sticky. Steve wiped them off with sanitary napkins despite their arguments. Amy was particularly against it. "Daddy, stop!" she yelled, drawing the attention of parents at another table. As if they were any better. As if their children were so polite. He wrangled Amy still and wiped her mouth with the moist towelette as she squealed.

The overhead speaker snickered at him in Radio Man static. "The only way out is through."

"Come on, let's go," Steve muttered, angrier than he wanted to sound. He grabbed his children by the wrists and ferried them out of the restaurant. He sat them down in the back of the car and locked them in. He paced around the parking lot for fifteen minutes before he joined them, begging God or the Universe or anyone for an

answer, for a tomorrow, for something to do.

A young woman, maybe fifteen or sixteen, walked around the side of the lot. Bleach-white hair sat mop-like on her head, the sides shaved clean down to the scalp. She was fatally thin and smelled of unwashed summer heat. She scanned the parking lot until her eyes fell on him. "Sir...?"

The stench of her made him recoil. He fished a couple crumpled bills from his pocket.

She took the money and ferreted it away in the folds of a tattered hoodie. "Thank you. But that's not what—"

He was already walking away, unlocking the driver's side door of the car and sliding into the seat. She stood outside the burger joint staring at him, something behind her eyes making him think about police detectives or psycho-analysts. He turned his keys in the ignition and tried to clear her smell out of the back of his throat.

"Daddy?" Charlie asked. "Who is that?"

"Doesn't matter," he mumbled. It didn't feel like a lie.

One day, he told Sarah, and she didn't believe him. He told his boss, and he didn't, either. He told a therapist and she prescribed him drugs. He told a cop and spent the day in a cell. He told anyone that would listen and nobody did. There was no point in keeping it secret, day after same-day. The Radio Man didn't seem to care, either.

"Tell everyone!" fifty televisions called out inside a Wal-Mart, "Tell everyone and maybe they'll start tuning in to the same channel!"

Shep slept on the floor in front of the dead TV screen. Steve stared into the flat black and drank espresso. Something moved behind the screen, inside the darkness, he was sure of it. He just had to see it. It was part of an answer. It had to be. Because there had to be an answer and he had to find it. He finished his fourth coffee of the morning and heard Sarah open the bedroom door.

"What are you doing out here?"

"Called out for the day," he answered, his words caffeine-sharp. "I needed time to think."

He could feel the words she wanted to say, feel them like static around the hairs of his arms. *You shouldn't skip work right now, maybe, or: we really need the money.* But she kept the words to herself and set about making her own clone of the kids' breakfasts. Eggs, English muffin, milk. The tuna sat in cold cans uneaten. He refilled his mug while she ate and sat back down in front of the screen.

"I'll go back in tomorrow," he said, feeling her eyes still on him. "I just needed a day off."

"You deserve one. I'm sorry about...I'll start freelancing again."

"We'll figure it out," he waited for the screen to pulse, for something to writhe inside it.

Shep roused with the smell of food. The squeak of dog-yawn made Steve wince. Radio Man came through Shep's mouth: "Police won't comment on what the man said, but one local neighbor said it was 'disturbing.'" The dog panted a couple times and trotted to the kitchen.

Steve kept staring at the screen.

Sarah did her writing outside, that day. In the quiet neighborhood with the nice grass, blissfully unaware of the thing vibrating under the skin of the world. Steve just sat in front of the television, eyes glued to the blank, endless screen. The kids came home, troubled their mother, and went to bed. Sarah came back inside, laptop under one arm and children's toys under the other.

"Nice show."

"Trying to meditate."

"Okay, then."

She vanished into the bedroom, where he could still hear her fingernails clack against keys. The clock ticked

forward. 9:30pm, 10:00pm, 11:43pm...it rolled over to 12:00am, 12:15am, 12:23am. Steve felt his breath get short. It was tomorrow. A smile crept across his face and he started giggling. 1:17am. He jumped up off the couch with a laugh and—

“...but his behavior had been bizarre leading up to the incident...” he turned over in bed and shut off the radio. A sob wracked through his body, and something hot lashed back at it. He stood up.

“I’m going to kill him,” he muttered, pulling on a pair of beaten sweatpants and a t-shirt from under the bed. “I’m going out there and I’m going to kill him.”

It was such a simple solution, he couldn’t believe he hadn’t tried it, already.

He walked out into the front yard and the grass smelled like static. He wasn’t sure if Sarah would follow, and it didn’t matter anyway. In less than 24 hours she would forget anything she’d heard him mutter that morning. For her, a rock song would play on the radio and she’d curl back up in bed. He crossed the lawn and reached the sidewalk.

Shep was there, waiting, staring up at him. The neighborhood stray cat sat next to her, staring with the exact same eyes. Their mouths opened at the same time and a rush of static washed through his head. Radio Man came out of their mouths: “You can’t kill me, here. You can’t die. Haven’t you figured it out? Go to the gun locker, open it, and take out the rifle. It’s easy when you do it. Wake up and it will be tomorrow.”

He rushed the animals and they scattered, running along green grass in different directions. He roared after them. When he turned back around, he saw the blond homeless girl staring at him from behind a tree. Her hood was up, but the look and the smell were unmistakable. “What the hell are you doing?” he snarled, stalking toward her, “Did you follow me? Did you *follow me to my house?*”

She retreated as quickly as the animals had. Something about her didn’t make sense, but he couldn’t place what.

Oceanrest Rock & Blues was housed in a tiny building on top of a hill northeast of town. It took him four hours to walk there. He could’ve taken a car, but he didn’t. The time gave him space to breathe, to brood, to let the answer solidify in his head. He had to kill the Radio Man. That was the only other option. Then, maybe, it would finally be over.

He expected to find a reception desk when he threw the door open, but there wasn’t one. There wasn’t anything. The place had been torn apart. A dented air vent hung from the half-collapsed ceiling, exhaling cool, sweet air into the dusty room. The remains of four destroyed chairs lay scattered across the floor like limbs after a bomb. He flinched at the thought.

His loafers were quiet against the floor as he made his way deeper into the station. Broken wires like nooses hung from everything. Ceiling tiles had been pried away to reveal leaking pipes and busted vents. Something had come through here and destroyed everything. He found no one waiting in the hallways as he went. The building was catacombs-empty.

The window that looked in on the recording studio dripped with opaque gray sludge. Steve reached out and touched it, feeling it cool and mud-like ooze around his fingers. He wiped the viscous residue on his pants and turned the corner.

The door to the studio hung open. Static crackled from inside the room.

Steve walked in.

The Radio Man stared at him from the center of the room. He had microphone heads as eyes and a smile that anyone in America could buy into. He tilted his head to one side and spoke in the same voice Steve had always heard, “Do you think you’ll wake up and it will be tomorrow?”

Steve charged him and put a fist in his everyman smile. His skin split around the Radio Man's teeth. Radio Man stumbled back and crashed spread-eagle on a small, worn table. Steve rushed forward and hit him, again, this time in the throat. Electric feedback spilled from Radio Man's mouth, the magnetic warble loud enough to make Steve grab his ears.

"His wife was out of the room two seconds later with a small pistol from the same safe. She fired and hit him in the stomach. He returned fire, spilling all her love out of her chest," the Radio Man was back on his feet, his voice deafening in Steve's head. "He was found strangling his dog on the front lawn, screaming."

Steve dove at the man and tackled him to the ground. He was deaf and blind from all the sound, but he didn't need to see or hear to keep punching. He lashed out with his fists until his knuckles were broken and all his skin was flayed by splintered bone. The Radio Man laughed through it all, bursts of static snicker and radio-persona crack-up exploding from his mangled face. He never fought back.

When the sound died away, Steve stood up. All the pain shrieking in his hands seemed like a distant, foggy memory. He staggered back through the empty radio station and walked out the front door, leaving twin trails of blood in his wake, dripping off his fingers.

Outside, a bird peered down at him from the boughs of a tree.

"The only way out is through," Radio Man's voice teased from its beak.

Amy's play never came. Charlie never wanted to go, anyway. Steve ran lines with her every morning, a rehearsal for a show that would never go up. There were always eggs and English muffins and not much else to eat. The safe whispered static in his dreams. The world whispered static in his daylight. The night ate the day and yesterday ate tomorrow. Amy and Charlie never grew older, never grew up, never complained about dating or learned about unemployment.

They smiled and laughed and sometimes they ran into walls and that was as bad as things got for them.

Static sizzled under the burning eggs. Steve's knuckles were bone-white around the spatula handle. How long had it been, now? How many times had he cooked the same breakfast?

"He went to the gun locker, opened it, and took out the rifle."

Was it a threat, or a promise? Was it the end, or the beginning?

The eggs sputtered on the pan. Shep wove between his legs. "Go to the gun locker!" the animal yipped in Radio Man's voice, "go to the gun locker!"

Steve picked the dog up and threw it against a wall. It landed with a whimper on the kitchen counter. "What the hell do you want from me!?" he screamed, grabbing the furry animal in his hands and shaking it. "What do you want!?"

"His wife, author Sarah Clarke, was still sleeping when the slaughter began."

He smashed the animal down against the countertop, hearing more bones splinter. "Why are you doing this to me!?"

"You'll break," Radio Man's voice was quieter, distorted, coming from a broken speaker inside the dog's body. "They always break. The only way out...the only way..."

He lifted Shep's body in the air and brought it down again, until the Radio Man stopped talking and the animal's corpse painted his hands red. Amy and Charlie went to stay with their aunt in Portland, and he spent the rest of the day in one of the police precincts.

The voice got more persistent. He unplugged the alarm clock and the birds outside would sing the report for hours. The dog would bark it, the stray cat would mewl it. The eggs started talking to him, the voice whispering beneath the sputtering oil. The television would flick on and the Radio Man's voice would come out of the news anchor, children's cartoons, Tony Soprano's mouth. It was all he heard all the time every day. It was in his head like a brain worm, eating his mind.

He opened Sarah's laptop and typed:

He went to the gun locker, opened it, and took out the rifle. He loaded it with five rounds and leaned it against the fridge as he cooked breakfast for his children. He walked back to the bedroom and kissed his wife on the forehead. She smiled faintly and turned over in bed. The walk back to the kitchen took the longest. It was time. There was no way out but through. He ruffled his children's hair and opened the fridge to reveal empty shelves.

His wife, author Sarah Clarke, was still asleep when the slaughter began. He killed his son, first, splattering blood across scrambled eggs like watery ketchup. His daughter tried to run away, screaming for her mother, but he shot her in the back of the throat before she could make it to the bedroom.

His wife was out of the room two seconds later with a small pistol from the same safe. She fired and hit him in the stomach. He returned fire, spilling all her love out of her chest. He was found strangling his dog on the front lawn, screaming.

Police won't comment on what the man said, but one local neighbor said it was 'disturbing.' His neighbor alleges he was screaming at the dog, sobbing, "Is this enough for you? Can this all finally be over, now?" when the first cop cars pulled up across the street.

Neighbors say Steven Clarke is a good man, but his behavior had been bizarre leading up to the incident. He'd written a grim short story on his wife's laptop depicting a similar scene to what happened that morning, and hadn't been to work for two or more days. Was it a psychotic break from reality? One witness might know the truth: a young homeless girl found on the sidewalk across from his home...

He hit 'snooze' and climbed out of bed. He pulled on a pair of boxers and a dirty t-shirt. He went to the gun locker, opened it, and took out the rifle. He loaded it with five rounds and prayed, hands so tight around the barrel he hoped it might break. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he begged the universe to intervene. Maybe someone would remember something, maybe Sarah would find the document he left on her laptop, or his boss would remember him screaming in the office, or the cop would remember locking him up—they'd remember, and they'd stop him. But he couldn't keep doing it, anymore. It had to be over.

He leaned the gun against the fridge as he cooked breakfast for his children. He wrung his hands in front of the stove and pursed his lips in another prayer. Shep looked up at him with microphone-head eyes, "After this, everything will be okay," Radio Man promised. "It's easier than you think. And then you'll all be free. All of you. They'll be free to dream what dreams may come. You'll wake up tomorrow."

Steve opened the front door and let the dog out into the yard. He walked back to the bedroom and kissed Sarah on the forehead. She smiled faintly and turned over in bed. Amy and Charlie laughed from the kitchen table. The sound of silverware scraping against plates cut through the everpresent static in his head. Footsteps crunched the green grass outside. Maybe it was a teenager on the way to school. Maybe it was a cop coming to gun him down. Maybe it was all in his head, anyway.

The walk back to the kitchen took the longest.

"Daddy," Amy called, face covered in peanut butter and jelly, "is mom coming to the play?"

"She wouldn't miss it for the world," he replied, voice quivering like his guts.

Charlie rolled his eyes when Steve ruffled his hair. The fridge was nearly empty. Groceries had been tight for some time. Everything had been tight for some time. Sarah's parents had an unfinished basement they could use for a while, but they'd have to bring their own walls. Tuna sat uneaten in the pantry. The sun rose at 6:45 AM and set at 8:20 PM. Everyone breaks, eventually.

Steve licked his lips and felt a shuddering breath force its way into his lungs. The children were very small and young and knew little about pain. At least this way they would never have to find out. He closed the fridge and picked up the rifle. The only way out was through. Maybe, if he was lucky, he would die from the stomach wound and it could all really be over. Maybe tomorrow could be born without him in it. Maybe the footsteps crossing the lawn were headed toward the front door. It sounded like it.

He imagined a young homeless girl, smelling of unwashed summer, swinging the door in. She would hold a knife in her hand and it would go up into his shoulder, on the inside, and he would bleed out on the floor. His family would never know why, and eventually they wouldn't need to know why. They would just live.

The doorknob turned.

He wrapped his finger around the trigger.

The End.

CASE #61426

**A MAN WAKES UP ANY MORNING
BY SPENCER RHYS HUGHES**



Details not released at this time.



Claymore Clara

by Liam C

Physician: Dr. Peterson
8268-WCT29

#90738

CASE #: 90738



CLAYMORE CLARA

BY LIAM C

THE FAT MAN WITH ONE EAR, dealt out another hand, his fingers moving across the deck with an uncanny speed. He's probably the most inconspicuous person in here but yet we can't pin anything on him, it's infuriating to say the least. I am pretending to be engrossed in my game, betting randomly between cards but I'm really here to keep an eye on the fat man and his accomplices.

A number of jewellers have been targeted lately, we know it's the fat man and his gang but evidence vanishes and witnesses suddenly have bouts of amnesia. The funny thing is tens of thousands of pounds worth of watches and stones just seem to turn up in back alley poker matches like this, but only when the fat man plays.

The hold-all is sat beneath his feet and, as soon as the buyer turns up I'm going to be ready for them. I've been doing this for a while now, this vigilante thing. To tell you the truth it's probably the most charitable thing I've done in my life. I finally feel like I'm giving something back to the community by making the streets safer. The press have even given me a title, Claymore Clara. I quite like it, a little inaccurate though, because I don't think I could even lift a claymore let alone wield one. I use a simple open razor, I suppose I can get used to it though it's kind of exciting.

The door opens and the man I recognise as the buyer edges his way over to the fat man. Money lands on the table and the hold-all is pushed out from underneath. The buyer then slips through the tables back towards the entrance. I finish my drink in one gulp and follow him out into the night.

Thunder grumbles as I step out into the empty street. I look up through the rain to see the buyer disappear through a door into a block of flats at the other end of the street. I pull out the mask from my handbag and squeeze my head into it. I made it myself and can honestly say I didn't think it would last this long, it's been about six weeks now and the material is holding up well. Two of the red stitches has burst but apart from that it's as good as new. I'm sure it's a psychological thing but I feel like the mask actually makes me stronger and braver. Before I would avoid confrontation at all costs and literally cross the street to avoid someone I didn't like the look of. Now though I'm serving out justice when the rest of the system fails.

I find the buyer sitting at a table, the hold-all turned on its side. He's trying on a watch, holding his wrist in front of his face and moving it back and forth. I move silently until I'm only a metre or so behind him. The buyer must've seen me from the corner of his eye as he jerks his head round just as I swipe the razor at his face. I feel the blade slide along his cheek and see the blood start to flow, he tries to swing a punch at me while holding his face. I duck and swing out again with the razor, cutting his arm.

His leg connects with my stomach and winded I fall to the ground. The buyer then rains punches on me. I can feel my own blood running down my face. I fumble for the razor and swipe it at his neck. I catch him just underneath his chin. He stands up holding his throat and steps backwards. I'm watching my arm, it's moving like it belongs to someone else, cutting the buyers face to ribbons. He falls to the floor and I can only assume he's dead.

I put the watches and some cash I find lying on the table back into the hold-all and head back into the street. I pull off the mask and stuff it back into my handbag, I walk quickly through the rain and head to my car. I check myself in the rear view mirror, using a baby wipe to I remove the blood from round my mouth.

I apply some lipstick and rummage through the contents of the bag. There's a particular watch that catches my fancy and I doubt I will ever be able to afford it on a police salary. I know it's against what I'm doing this for but no one is perfect, dumping the hold-all at the police station I head home to admire my new watch.

The End.

CASE #90738

CLAYMORE CLARA

BY LIAM C



Details not released at this time



Guilt Travels

by Brandon Boudreaux

Physician: Dr. Lotherton
8715-AED19

#45669

CASE #: 45669



GUILT TRAVELS

BY BRANDON BOUDREAUX

The following was translated from pages discovered beneath the oven of my studio apartment. When I first moved to Ohio from out west, I found myself with about a week of free time before beginning graduate school and so, having little else to do, I spent my time vigorously deep-cleaning the hundred-square foot apartment, a cleaning it desperately needed. With the aid of a yard stick, I found pages of gray loose-leaf paper flattened between my oven and the floor tiles. The script was written in black ink in an eastern language I couldn't understand. The short epigraph was English.

Know that your intentions travel farther than you wish.

-Yukio¹

¹ With two exceptions, the entries were written in a Japanese script known as romaji. In contrast to kanji, hiragana, and katakana, which use character symbols, romaji uses the Latin alphabet, making the translation process easier for my part. The handwriting seemed slightly smaller than usual, an anomaly I noticed immediately but significance I would not learn until later.

My neighbor across the hall, Frank his name was, died one or two days ago; I can't be sure exactly when.³ An investigator from the county found his body earlier this evening. I was tickling the electric ivories when I heard the knocking and a low, bassy voice outside my door, and so I turned up the volume on my headphones plugged into my keyboard and didn't take them off until I needed to refill my glass. When that time did come I walked over to my refrigerator, accidentally knocking the door of my freezer on the door of my studio apartment, and the low voice asked, "What was that?" "Neighbor," said a second voice, dismissing me altogether. I quietly filled my glass, checked that my door was locked and dead-bolted, and then casually looked through my peephole.

The two men were police officers – well, the one in uniform definitely was, the other was wearing a black P_____⁴ County T-shirt tucked into blue jeans. My neighbor's door was open. The uniformed officer was standing in the hall, and the other was inside looking over piles of books and clothes on the floor. I listened in (yes, the doors in this building let sound through very well, but the insulation of the walls between apartments is awe-inspiring). The investigator inside asked about a pick-up truck, to which the officer replied that he had purchased it that very afternoon, and with less than seventy-thousand miles, if you can believe the luck.⁵ I guessed my neighbor had gone missing and the pair was searching his apartment, a search that had turned up little information worth verbalizing. "Did you see the pipe next to the computer?" the investigator asked. "It has marijuana mixed in with tobacco." The officer deemed that only a chuckle was the appropriate response, and lifted the camera to his eye and snapped a photo of the apartment from the hallway. I started scanning Frank's apartment through the fish-eyed peephole. Limited by the frame of the open door, I could make out a number of plastic cups near the sink inside Frank's apartment, piles of dark clothes in piles on the floor and draped across the back of what is probably the sofa. There were pale oblong shapes on the floor and hanging on the walls that I couldn't quite make out because of the effect of the peephole, and against the far wall I could barely make out a computer sitting on a desk. From inside, the investigator started dialing a number on a cell phone. Now, I figured, I'd know what was going on.

"Hello, Mrs. M_____,", he said. "This is A___ B_____⁶, an investigator with the P[ortage] County Sherriff's Office. We got a call that Frank has been missing and we arrived here at his apartment and discovered he's deceased."

Damn⁷ – just like that. That's how he said it. He told the woman on the other line to calm down, take a few deep breaths... This was a seasoned, cold-blooded bastard. I put down my drink so the ice wouldn't chink against the glass. I looked in Frank's apartment, realizing that one of those oblong shapes on the floor I couldn't recognize earlier was in fact his arm. That's what the officer was taking a picture of in the hallway. I had no way of knowing where Frank was from originally, and so couldn't know how far away the woman on the phone was, listening to a stranger explain at eleven-thirty at night that Frank was dead. Damn – just like that. He consoled her with cold words and I backed away from my door. I grabbed a pack of cigarettes, walking across my apartment to open the window. Once I opened my window, I could plainly see the wheels of the police car, the red and swirling blue light, and black van parked in front of the building.

There was more speaking outside my door, so I let my cigarette smoke away in an ashtray balanced on

2 Curiously, Yukio omitted the years from these pages. If he wanted to keep the information a secret, why date the entries all?

3 Yukio's opening line, reminiscent of Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, sets the tone for his entries. I deduced Yukio was a student in the program, and if he was not in some literature program, he at least had an invested interest in western prose styles.

4 Most likely meant to be Portage County. This device could indicate why Yukio chose the romaji script as opposed to Kanji. Evidently, the script is learned by almost all Japanese grade school students.

5 Yukio's phrase: *Totemo ungaii*, which translates to something like "Very lucky!" I felt a direct translation would be too forceful (if not a little silly), destroying the tone of an otherwise somber piece.

6 Despite all inquiries to the police department, I could never discover the names.

7 Yukio's term, *kuso*, can mean a few things: shit, horseshit, excrement. It can also be added to a word to convey a general sense of annoyance. I found the terse term "damn" to be to most economical.

the window sill and crossed my apartment. I leaned against my door and didn't look through my peephole this time. The girlfriend is here, one of the voices said. Yeah, she's just arrived. I ask⁸ myself: Are they going to bring her here?⁹ Why on earth would they do that? The voice mentions that the girlfriend is in front of the apartment complex. I quickly sprinted to my window, hearing a third male voice outside. My curtains were drawn, but the blinds were closed. Opening them might bring suspicion, so I leaned with my ear against the window, exhaling the remaining smoke into my apartment. Then I hear the young girl speak ... sort of. She chokes out a few numbers unevenly ("One...Five...Oh...Oh..."), the other voice telling her to take a few deep breaths, etc...

I felt that I should leave them alone, and so I crossed my apartment again to my door and looked through the peephole. An elderly couple had arrived, the older man shaking hands with the investigator. I tried to read the markings on their T-shirts, but couldn't make anything out. They wheeled in a gurney. Shit,¹⁰ I thought. This is it. He really is dead. My gaze fell to the floor, and then I walked back to the window. The girl was still speaking in choppy syllables, but was a bit more coherent. She tried to speak to someone on a phone, I guessed, because when she started outright crying, the voice must have taken the phone, and spoke into it what needed to be said.

There was noise from his apartment. I took my time stepping back to the peephole, crossing the length of my apartment yet again. I thought about what it would be like – seeing Frank's body on the gurney under the sheet. Black sheet? White? I looked through the peephole. He was already on the gurney, zipped up in a white body bag (not a sheet at all).

The coroners wheeled him out of his apartment easier than I had maneuvered my futon into mine. Old hat for them, I guess. The coroners, investigator, and officer spoke a few casual words of departure, and Frank exited his apartment for the last time. I walked over to my window, but could no longer hear any voices.¹¹

It was apparent from the descriptions of the apartment that Yukio was a previous occupant of my own complex. I can attest, at least, to the quality of sound insulation and being able to easily hear sounds from the apartment's hallways. I found a student in the Asian studies department who agreed to be my Japanese language informant; we met at a place called Zephyr's, which has an outside patio where smokers usually convene. We met on a Sunday afternoon, and I wasted little time in producing Yukio's pages. He roughly translated the passages out loud (as compensation, I bought the drinks along the way), and I took copious notes to get a general feel for the narrative. In the graduate lounge the next day, he handed me an English-Japanese dictionary and I began translating.

I had inquired about Yukio to my landlord, who politely explained that she couldn't give out information on past tenants.

Nov. 8 ____

Frank's alarm woke me up this morning; the sound rose like a mist in my apartment and softly tugged me awake. This has happened a few times before on weekends, when I figured he was away for a couple of days and forgot to turn it off. I don't think it was so much the volume of the alarm as it was the persistent tone. If someone says a single word to you while you're sleeping, you might not wake up. But an insistent chant

8 Tense shifts in the middle of scenes are a mark of sloppy writers, but there was something intentional about Yukio's shifts that I felt it best to preserve.

9 Rhetorical questions are severely frowned upon in contemporary American writing, especially in young writers, who rely on them to clue the reader into what they should be thinking. I felt it necessary to keep these to maintain the psychology of the original text.

10 Here Yukio used the same word *kuso*, yet I chose to translate it differently here for the sake of variation.

11 In keeping with Venuti's idiom that when considering a translation, "the foreign language is the first thing to go," I used the original Japanese as a basic guide for narrative, and applied a tone to fit it. In the end, only the work produced matters, and learning Yukio's apparent reading habits (to be discussed later), I feel the somber quality of words was what he was going for. Perhaps.

chant chant of your name, at pretty much any volume, would do the trick. I can't remember if I had dreams¹² or not. I've found a few blank papers near my oven in the kitchen. I must write everything down to keep it from festering inside my mind.

* * *

I went for groceries around nine this evening. Upon returning, the alarm clock was again sounding in Frank's apartment, inundating the hallway. I think it had been doing that all day. I unlocked my door, the paper bag in my free arm, and turned to look at his door. It began to sound like a voice. I wanted to knock; I probably wasn't supposed to know about his death; I almost felt like a thief. And still, incessantly, the alarm clock sang. I stepped over, putting my ear to his door, raising a fist to knock. If I would have done the same movement two days ago, things might have been different. I stood there for a few moments, and then I thought that his door was most likely unlocked. Who would know if I just walked in and turned off the alarm?

I dropped my raised fist, turned to my door, and walked into my apartment.

I would know.¹³

Finding a dead end with my landlord, I began casually asking faculty members in the literature program if they had ever met a Japanese writer named Yukio. No luck with professors so I approached the chair, who remarked that in recent memory there have been a number of Japanese writers in the department, but that particular name didn't ring a bell.

The more I translated the journal entries, the more I kept looking around my apartment with his eyes.

He was aiming for an endemically American style of prose. The majority of my exposure to the language in translation has been (far from literary, I admit) video games.¹⁴ Playing the games I noticed an odd, to an American gamer's ear, number of phrases that were extremely abstract and philosophical, phrases that an American would find hokey in conversation. I realized that Yukio had been striving for a western prose style to convey what may or may not have been a work of fiction.

Nov. 11 ____

It is possible to slap yourself awake. I suppose few people know it. It's three-thirty a.m. and I just woke up. My left cheek, though not discolored, is slightly warmer with that distinct after-slap feel. In the dream¹⁵ which I slapped myself awake from, two things were happening: one that was interesting on a couple of levels, and one that wasn't very interesting at all.

I was reading a series of typed pages Maiko was dictating, like a movie (that's right – I specifically remember reading in my dream, though I've heard that it's impossible to read in your dreams; since it happened only a few minutes ago, I can remember two distinct lines – the first being “a-and what you going to do?” and the second was “He wanted a marriage but we all know she isn't a people wife.”¹⁶ The latter is telling because

12 For all other instances in the piece, Yukio uses the term *dorimu* to mean “dream,” yet here, and only here, he used the term *maboroshi*, which can also mean “phantom” or “illusion.”

13 For time in memoriam, translators have dealt with the challenge of faithfulness to the source text. Lynne Long, in *Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?* gives a synopsis of this essential question through a number of theorist's perspectives, namely, Schleiermacher's foreignising vs. domesticating, Nida and Tader's formal correspondence vs. dynamic equivalence, and Gutt's direct vs. indirect translation. Since the piece was set in America, Yukio was not aiming to write an endemically Japanese text, and so I leaned towards a domesticating perspective when working with his text.

14 See the *Final Fantasy* series from Squaresoft, as well as the *Metal Gear* and *Silent Hill* series from Konami for examples of current gaming translation. See *Zero Wing* from Toaplan for a translation that was so poorly executed it spawned one of the first internet memes.

15 Dreams are another convention American editors are wary of in younger writers.

16 Having taken a cue from Michael Emmerich's translation of Genichiro Takahashi's *Sayonara, Gangsters*, I have replaced Yukio's phrases

I immediately got the joke although it shouldn't really make sense to anyone else, but I suppose that's the advantage of being able to tell jokes to your own psyche). I was reading – Maiko was speaking – the narratives of individuals that she had dated. In my dream I turned a crimson rage.¹⁷

Now, the two results that came about were: I sort of faded awake to blow out the candle that had been burning when I had fallen asleep, and in the grogginess I felt the heat on my left cheek and thought to myself – Did I really just slap myself awake?

And the other thing is that I can't stop laughing.

Feeling disturbed by this passage, I called up a friend of mine in the psychology department for a beer. On the back patio of the bar beneath a haze of cigarette smoke, I asked her if it was, in fact, possible for someone to slap themselves awake. She said we should continue the conversation at her office.

Nov. 14 ____

Every time I walk down the hallway to my apartment, I pause and look at Frank's door. How many people in the building know? Sometimes I can hear the alarm clock, and each time I approach the door. Sometimes I hear someone walking down the hallway and I quickly duck inside my apartment. Sometimes, the hallways pulse with the alarm. I wonder who it is that breathes.

There are knockings in the pipes of my bathroom, and they tell me things.

Nov. 16 19__

I had trouble showering this morning. I had given myself insomnia¹⁸ so I could get to the lab early and washed myself at four a.m. I tried taking a cold shower to help my mind, but the water would not get cold; it came out steaming and steaming it remained despite my best efforts. Ice melted when I threw in the cubes. Through the stream, I thought I saw¹⁹ something.

Behind me in the shower, water drops and steam bounced off a patch of air roughly the shape of a person. The water would not turn off for another ten minutes when it suddenly stopped, and I could hear the faint echo of whistling.

I had all but abandoned my attempts to find Yukio, but kept translating nonetheless. Then I picked up the trail at the university library. Stumbling through the stacks, I picked up a book on the work of Raymond Carver.²⁰ I found a sheet of paper folded inside. Feeling lucky, and weighed down with books, I used it to jot down the call numbers of books I would later return for, and then noticed the lines on the page forced me to write smaller than usual. I unfolded it and counted thirty-three lines per sheet (standard college-ruled pages have thirty-two). There was also a series of ten numbers written in ink, and the pages smelled a bit like smoke. Arriving at my apartment to work on Yukio's journals, I noted that his sheets, also, had thirty-three lines per page. And all of the pages were the same

with my own. As far as my informant and I could tell, the original phrases were a collection of arbitrary and unconnected words, though I did keep the negation as well as the terms "wife" and "marriage" because of their later significance.

17 *Kyoubou*. Can also mean "frenzy."

18 A tricky verb tense here. It sounds, I believe, a bit more ominous than the simple past. In any event, the two tenses in Japanese are identical.

19 Yukio's page actually reads *hia* ("hear") here, but a brief handwritten note in pencil on the back of the paper, in English, reads: "I saw Frank, not *heard* Frank."

20 Hallett, Cynthia Whitney. *Minimalism and the Short Story – Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robinson*. Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1999.

faded gray.

Nov. ____

Here: A Poem Composed From a Dream²¹

Blue Smoke is cement
to my boots
to her bracelets
to our night forest of screams and whispers

Car seats dangling like nooses, awash in this dark blue smoke
when we say our goodbye – When I commanded you, “Goodbye.”
Once and, say they do²², for all.

It is the sound of the dingy blue Smoke
that smells like gasoline
that permeates
pouring from the rubber tubes.
Entwined rubber tubes that form a complete circuit.
It is this Blue Smoke, this cement, in this romantic forest,
where I tell you, “So Long!”

I make the smoke enter your lungs

Did I mention those tubes
surrounded by the Dark Blue Smoke that spells out your name in the air
those entwined tubes are in the shape of my car?
My car, your grave, our eternity.

Our Dirty Blue²³ Smoke²⁴

21 This poem is originally in English.

22 I think he means “As they say.”

23 Yukio uses several words here for “blue”; *buru*, which refers both the hue as well as connotes sadness (as would be familiar to anyone familiar with English). His other term, *omoi*, can also mean heavy, massive, or sluggish. For the purposes of my translation, I have chosen to translate *buru* as “blue,” and *omoi* as “Blue.”

24 The final word of Yukio’s poem is *mizukemuri*, which means a mist over a body of water. Since English has no similarly loaded term, I

Nov. 17 19__

Tonight, walking into my apartment after twelve hours in the office, I saw a sign around my door handle for the new pizza restaurant. There was also one on Frank's door. I noticed the rest of the tenants in the hallway had apparently already taken their coupons – the corridor was devoid of any other advertisements. I believe it is only us workaholics and the dead who have no time for such deals.²⁵

Nov. 18 ____

I brushed my teeth earlier this evening and black liquid smoke²⁶ oozed from the faucet. I used up my mouthwash, but could not stop speaking in ash.²⁷

By this point in my translation, I figured what I had was a piece of short fiction, and Yukio was most probably a fictional author. I felt a little disappointed at first – it was fun being a detective; but the more I looked around Kent and especially my apartment, I felt more and more like I had a hidden knowledge – access to a way of seeing things no one else had.

The numbers on the paper from the Carver book in the library turned out to be a phone number. Presumably whoever Yukio was, he had checked this book out. One afternoon, my curiosity got the better of me. Sitting at my writing desk, I produced the sheets and called the number. After dialing and paying a reasonable surcharge, I was greeted by a voice speaking Japanese. I only mentioned the name Yukio, and the voice responded with yelling, then choked sobs, then silence. I haven't called back.

Directly above my writing desk – and I know they weren't there before – a series of four uneven scratches running vertically up the wall.

Nov. 19 1___

Odd things are occurring. I had a dream last night. I was trying to behead someone with a serrated knife. A large serrated knife – the teeth like tiny angry mountains. I sawed as vigorously as I could but couldn't get passed his windpipe, and he kept telling me to try harder, even turning his head to assist the angle. I awoke and vomited on my couch.

Nov. 20 ____

I threw out all kitchen knives today. But more oddities. I was reading last night, around ten o'clock, when I heard this high-pitched buzzing. Short, consistent sounds. I tried to ignore it, thinking it was perhaps coming from a neighbor's apartment. I went to get a drink from the kitchen, and realized that the sound was actually kept "smoke" for consistency.

25 Ultimately, perhaps it does not matter much exactly what choices a translator makes, as long as those choices are consistent. David Constantine, in *A Living Language*, discusses Chapman's use of different verse forms in translating *Iliad* and then *The Odyssey*. Constantine writes: "There are advantages and disadvantages in each; the important thing here is to recognize that each is a choice, a strategy, an effort at equivalent effect in the native tongue" (22).

26 This time, Yukio uses the *kokuen* to mean "smoke," which carries with it the implication of blackness.

27 This phrase appears in the original romaji as *hai de hanasu*. It is a direct translation, and I have no idea what it means. See note 43.

coming from my own intercom. The noise was almost imperceptibly low, so I thought it was a malfunction. Having never used it before, I looked at the layout of buttons, finally pressing LISTEN, the one that apparently connected my apartment to the foyer of the complex.

Dammit, Yukio. Why did you...

I cut off Frank's voice by releasing the button.

I couldn't fall asleep, and couldn't keep my mind productive enough for study, and so I looked back through my journal entries. I found one marked October 28, anachronistically placed after a few November entries. The majority of the text was crossed out, only the occasional peek with the words "... Why Maiko..." and "...someone who isn't you..." appearing through the scratched characters. I could hardly recognize the handwriting.²⁸

I can also attest to the malfunctioning intercom, which my landlord assures me will be fixed before the end of the month.

I don't intend to intrude upon the text, but I've experienced an oddity worth mentioning. After translating this last entry, I had a disturbing dream. I dreamt I was in a school bus with half a dozen other guys – we were interviewing for some job or other. Part of the interview process was to be shot in the head. They told us this over a loud speaker and we looked around nervously at one another, but one of the guys just shrugged his shoulders and said "We gotta do what we gotta do." And so it was my turn to shoot the guy so he could proceed with the interview, and I couldn't believe myself when I raised the pistol and shot him in the temple. He slumped to the floor of the bus and I thought, I guess we all have to do it. His bloody head bobbed against the side of the bus and spurted out, "Thanks."

I also woke up sick, and my kitchen sink has been clogged for a day.

Nov. 22 19__

I have filled my kitchen sink with books and vow never to use it again. But first, at the beginning.

Today began a good day; dreamless sleep all weekend. My work is going well – I did little professionally today. I spent the morning reading (so few these days²⁹) for pleasure. I treated myself to a hearty lunch at Lake Shore Restaurant³⁰ and enjoyed the afternoon with tea and a video game (I am currently replaying the game, but this time the English version. My, how translation is everything!)

The sun set in the evening, and I began to fall ill. I dozed on my futon, facing my game for an unknown time, when I heard a thump behind me. Then another.

Then a scrape.

Something was in my kitchen. I paused, saved the game, placed my controller on the carpet, walked over to the television and turned it off, and looked at my kitchen in the reflection of the dead screen. I saw nothing was in the kitchen or in the sink. But I still heard the uneven thumping. I turned and my eyes locked on the empty sink as I took slow steps toward the kitchen.

28 Playing off the Borgesian idea that a text is not completed until it is translated, I felt comfortable experimenting with form, diction, tone, etc. with Yukio's words, which were originally written in single paragraphs per entry. It is my hope that my manipulation of the English language at his direction moves the work closer to his original intent, which is ultimately aimed to transcend language itself.

29 A weird, charming little phrase I translated literally.

30 Such a place does not exist in Kent and, as far as I can tell, never has. Oddly enough, Lake Shore is a fictional restaurant in the *Silent Hill* video game series mentioned earlier.

Inside the sink, materializing with each step I got closer, the grey³¹ flesh of a flopping arm emerging from the drain clawed at the air and linoleum around it. My first thought: a dude³² couldn't fit in there. The hand was holding an invisible knife; it clumsily and slowly flopped about without aim as the invisible edge scraped my sink. The sink reverberated with the throaty sound of a voice. And the arm flopped.

I handed it a dish sponge which seemed to steady it, and I understood this decayed flesh was Frank's arm. I stepped back into my television area and it faded away, dropping the sponge (now blood red) to the floor. I started collecting the books I no longer needed.

Nov. 23 1___

I saw a man at the bus stop today. It's snowing so the fact that he wore gloves wasn't unusual – it was just that his black gloves looked so thin they wouldn't provide much protection from the cold. I looked at my heavy mittens and stole glances at everyone else's hardware. It turns out my gloves are the heaviest, but I still felt that man was weird.

Later this evening, I fell asleep at my writing desk, only to wake now, just before midnight. Yet another disturbing dream I cannot get rid of until it is released on paper by my hand. Here goes:³³ I hope I don't have to do this often.

A man with thin black gloves holds them out to me. They have blood-crimson stitching along the fingers (I think to myself – that's the mark of someone who knows what he's doing.). He whispers: One and a half thousand. He twists his hands and makes a cracking noise.

One and a half thousand, I ask.

Don't play dead,³⁴ he says. One-Five-Oh-Oh.

That's a whole heck of a bunch³⁵. (I've been noticing I'm more and more dreaming in my daughter language.)

It is what it is.³⁶ I do a professional job. Looks like an accident every time.

Now he was doing it – speaking English. His gloved hands, now disembodied inside a whirl of smoke, eagerly awaited payment.

I awake to stomach pains.

Maybe those numbers on the paper aren't phone numbers after all. I went back to the library and typed the numbers into the catalog. A book came up. It was just something on Mediterranean cuisine, but I wasn't satisfied with just ignoring it. There may be something about the book itself. I went up to the eighth floor where I rent a small private cubicle for the semester. They are conveniently available for grad students and faculty, and I liked to think Yukio had one of his own as well. After a few minutes of thumbing through the book, I noticed nothing unusual. Except that (and this may have been my imagination) it smelled slightly like smoke. I checked it out and took it with me anyway.

31 The difference between "grey" and "gray" is purely a stylistic one – Americans prefer "gray." For the purposes of this piece, however, I decided to make Yukio's word "grey," which it typically preferred abroad.

32 Not really a direct translation. Yukio's term *yatsu* can mean: fellow, guy, or object, stuff. It can also be either familiar or derogatory, depending on the speaker's relationship to the person.

33 *Ikimashou ka*. Literally, "Shall we go?" My informant helped me here – the word choice is his.

34 Yukio's handwriting is at its poorest in this entry. It appears his term could be *deddo* meaning "dead," yet the way it's written it could also be *damo*, meaning "dumb." If Yukio did in fact mean *deddo* perhaps this phrase is another instance of his twisting dream logic word games.

35 See my note 16.

36 *Desu nanto desu*. For the discerning reader's interest. *Desu* can also mean "death."

When I returned home, my sink was finally unclogged.

Nov. 25 19__

Here, Maiko:

An eternity of pale blue clouds on all sides of us while directly beneath our glowing feet the obsidian crag just so recently we ascended inch after bloody inch: a picnic for a special occasion is what I would tell you. My lines are well-rehearsed; my clothing chosen special; my demeanor honorable. I like this new you, you would say. The clouds permeate all around us. We are air. I say: It's much colder here on the other side of the world; it even snows in Ohio. You would have picked out shapes wisping³⁷ in the clouds with your slender finger. Look – there's a baseball cap, there's a kitchen knife, there's Thailand, there's a betrayal. I am at a loss for words, and so gently as the wind that bathes us atop this dreary mountain of secret intentions (It's so romantic here, you would³⁸ have said), I place my hand at your back and say: Look – there's your husband. Then, I push.

*Prof. W_____*³⁹ emailed me today. It turns out the story I submitted to him for workshop yesterday was written entirely in romaji – he thinks I'm becoming a smart ass. In my cubicle on the eighth floor of the library, light vertical scratches appear on the inside of the door. Four of them, again. My sink, though remains unclogged, makes a weird whirling sound like voices whenever water throws itself down there. The halls, I think I imagine, pulsate when my alarm clock goes off. Yukio is beginning to wear me.

Undated Journal Entry

I write this from the safety of the eighth floor of the library, a place I reserved solely for professional work, but contamination of my private life is unavoidable. So here I am, uncertain if I shall return to my apartment.

It was midafternoon, an inconvenient time of day when more and more⁴⁰ I find myself falling unavoidably asleep no matter where I am or what I'm doing. I was in my apartment reading an article on human motion as it relates to robotic design⁴¹ and I must have drifted off. Sitting right up. I was startled by the window: tapping, scratching, scraping. I approached the window and the sunlight was such that I could both see through the glass outside and catch the reflection of things illuminated inside. Outside I saw a goose; inside I saw my bed shuffle.

I continued to face the window; the goose made sounds of a police siren and started turning red and flashing blue. Soon the muffled cries of Frank's girlfriend rose like a mist. Then my couch groaned. I turned and there was Frank, decaying head and smoke-grey arm twisting from between my futon's frame and mattress. There's no way a whole dude could fit between there, I thought. The head, white soiled-string white hair thinly covering the flaky scalp, bobbed around, the smoke from his nostrils leaving a trail in the air; his gloved arm (the glove with the red stitching along the fingers) clumsily reaching for the only serrated knife I kept hidden inside the wall, scratching the carpet with each failed attempt to reach it. His dead flesh was peeling – bits would chip off him and that decayed flesh would fall to the walls and soak right trough.⁴² Between that and

37 *Ichijou*. Though a neologism and thus should be avoided, I decided to make it a verb here.

38 As stated earlier, much of Yukio's writing is in the simple past. He wrote this entry in the simple present. It was only after reviewing my translation days later that I realized I had inadvertently slipped into the conditional perfect.

39 Taking a cue from Yukio, I respectfully omit the real names of my colleagues.

40 *Iyoiyo*. Yukio's annoying little phrase I find *iyoiyo* a pain in the ass.

41 The first and only indication of Yukio's profession. Kent has no robotics program. Yukio is a liar.

42 See my later insert regarding this phrase.

the scratches on the carpet and the bits of ash that fell from the corner of his mouth every time he parted his cracked lips to groan at me, he was making a decayed mess of the place. He was even soiling the air. I felt fingernail scratches on my chest. My stomach felt guilty.

Outside, the girl's sobs grew louder and she choked out those numbers once again. One – Five – Oh – Oh. Frank's head snapped towards me; he grabbed the carpet with his single emaciated arm and pulled himself a little further out the futon, enough to straighten his neck and turn his yellow eyes to mine. No eyelids – just accusation in the form of dead eyeballs.

He moved his wordless lips, ash cracking and falling to the floor. Frustrated by his dumbness he let out a snort and the smoke from his nose smelled like gasoline. I knelt down and inched closer; I heard his throat rumble. She repeated the numbers; coarse, cracked, and feeble, he said, "It is what it is." He spoke in ash.⁴³

I responded: But Frank, I did nothing to Maiko.

His gloved hand at my throat.

I hear my own neck break.

I came to in my bathroom; the mirror was shattered; the knife on the tiles.⁴⁴

A few days after translating this passage, I reviewed my translation and was struck by "falls to the walls." It made me laugh. I wanted to ask my informant if it was a play on some phrase. How lucky, it was penny pitchers night at Zephyr's and he had a spare hour. We sat outside at our usual spot and I had just finished a kokuen when he arrived.

I gave him the original and my rough translation and poured the beer as he looked them over.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Falls to the walls? Is that a phrase or something?" I peered over at Yukio's writing. "What's the romaji say?"

"You mean the part you added?"

"What part I added?" I was offended by the accusation.

"Here," he pointed to my text. "You inserted this paragraph between here," then he referred back to Yukio, "and here. There is no Japanese."

I looked at my own writing, which (It only occurred to me just then) was written much more sloppily and smaller than the rest of the text. I regarded my informant, and wondered if that knife Yukio hid in the wall was still there.

Yukio's Final Journal Entry – Undated.⁴⁵

I am now residing in my oven. Don't worry – it's bigger on the inside and I've always kept it clean. Both spick and span, as they say.⁴⁶

43 Earlier, Yukio had written *hai de hanasu* when he referred to himself speaking. Now that Frank was uttering, he wrote, *hai de hassei*. *Hassei* also means utterance, but also can mean leading a group of people.

44 The day after translating this passage, I reviewed my work only to discover I had not translated it at all – I had simply copied it word for word into my notebook in a handwriting that looked similar to, but not exactly, my own. I've been drinking more.

45 The words in this entry get progressively smaller and neater until they end so damn small I needed a magnifying glass to read them. You know how hard it is to find one of those, Yukio?

46 Here, I could at least correct his mistake. You're welcome, Yukio.

I came in here because the floors fell. Down, down: into eternity. I was just lying there and they sank.

Goodbye floors! Thanks for the support!⁴⁷

Napping on my futon when that damn dingy blue smoke came. The floor went down and it was all cloud and smoke down there. Casually, I peer⁴⁸ over the sides, see the infinity down there, and shrug.

At least, thankfully I guess, my furniture stay in their places along the walls. Only not so thankfully because soon Frank crawls out my desk drawer. Head, and slowly then death-grey arms, and finally tattered-flesh legs.

He's still decomposing, soot and ash emerge from him and falls to the walls again, but this time he moves quicker, sharper. He's got the hang of being a corpse now. From my futon, I watch the clouds beneath us begin to swirl. With those stupid gloved hands Frank pulls out that stupid serrated knife. He starts ripping the walls. Four vertical tattered slices.

Sayonara, Security Deposit!

But the walls scream in Maiko's voice. And Frank screams right back at them. I wonder what they argue, but I feel time is getting smaller.

Wind blows from the tears Frank rips in the walls; the clouds rotate faster and faster. My kitchen is there. Maiko is louder. At least be thankful. I jump to the oven as my futon is consumed in that stupid blue car exhaust smoke. All the things I thought attack me, not Maiko as I intended all those years ago. The wind picks up as Frank and the walls scream louder – everything is a swirl of ash smoke.

Inside my oven – my hope.⁴⁹

It was quiet in here at first – just the inside of the oven. I fell asleep. I woke up with writing material and the knife. The oven has become a curiosity. Upwards is the bottom of a cliff and everything smells like dirty blue smoke.⁵⁰ The trees are made out of assassin gloves.

I am sorry for my intention, Maiko. I am sorry for my actions, Frank. But at least you now have vengeance. I lower the pen and raise the knife.⁵¹

When the wind began to blow uncontrollably inside my apartment, I started yelling into the oven, asking Yukio what I should do but he said he was upset by all the nasty things I had written. I wanted to join Frank and so I tore up the wall and found your serrated knife, Yukio, and then went out to purchase black gloves (they didn't have the red-stitched ones so I had to do that myself) and so call out "Hasei to me, Frank!"⁵² No one on the eight floor of the library even saw it coming! As it turns out, the oven is quite cozy if you don't move. I take notebook paper and chop it up and make thirty-three lines a page. My itonami I hide beneath the oobun.

47 A visiting poet on campus commented on the use of exclamation points in writing. "A writer is allotted five exclamation points in his or her entire career. Maybe six. Choose wisely." Yukio fills his quota in this one piece.

48 I checked with my informant to make sure the verb tense shift was in the original. "It sounds better than way," he responded.

49 Yukio, that's what you get for wanting to kill your girlfriend! Punk!

50 Thankfully, this is the last time this tiresome phrase appears. Was he failing at being profound, or just trying to be cute?

51 Finally! On with it!

52 And why not use up all allotted exclamation points? If this is Yukio's only literary contribution to the world, why not have a little fun?

CASE #45669

GUILT TRAVELS

BY BRANDON BOUDREAUX



Brandon Boudreaux received his MFA from the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts program. He currently teaches composition at Westmoreland County Community College and English as a Second Language for the American Language Institute. His interests include writing, music, and video games. His previous work has appeared in The Coe Review.



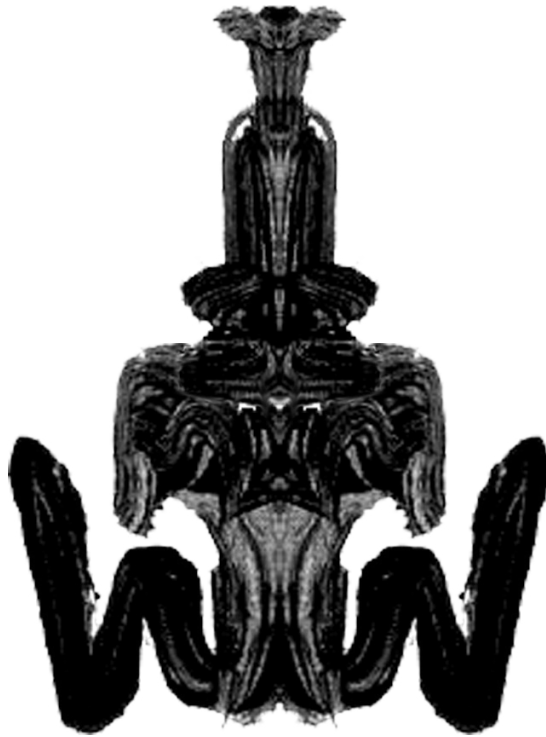
Nightseed

by Jon Wheeler

Physician: Dr. Lichten
6428-SED41

#93436

CASE #: 93436



NIGHTSEED

BY JON WHEELER

THERE WERE MANY CORNERS IN THE COTTAGE. SHADOW RULED.

Mother rested her hand on a chair back and rose up on her toes, arching her back as far as the sudden pang allowed. The contraction pinched her spine with an uneasy but not unbearable pain. Mother grinned softly in relief as it passed and a breeze parted the curtains to glance across her body, hardening her nipples and pebbling her skin in goose pimples.

Too soon. She relaxed, settled onto her feet and looked cautiously around. The shadow had lengthened unnaturally fast to spread across the floor from under the table and the cupboard, a mire of restless ill will into which the small house was too quickly sinking.

A cutting edge, this shadow, a knife pressed against small hopes. Press, press and feel the give, the push-tug and the red running salt, yes? No no no. Licking her lips, Mother shook her head. Her thin brown skin tightened in creases over mottled veins. No, my hope cannot be dangled or severed, or depleted. No rest, no savor. Resistance. Kissing finger teeth, my bastards.

But my Lord, she sighed, see me. All alone, and here come the thieves to scavenge the meat and soil the well. See and have care, your son is done kicking. He comes. She would resist the shadows and their striking devils as she had done for so long, but it was harder not to worry tonight with the birth upon her. Closing her eyes and rocking her body so that the chair drummed on the uneven floor, she breathed deeply, exhaled, and relaxed her

body once more.

Yes, He will manifest His will. But mercy for me that I may prove strong to that will. That His son may thrive against falseness, against pretense.

Amen. So be it. And so it would be because it must be. Because the offspring of perfection could achieve no less than the ideal. She should not worry, she told herself. But she worried even so. The others had been so fair, woven of a thread so fine and too easily torn. Would this child, her only true child, be so different? Or was her belief in Nightseed's strength simply a mother's pride? Was he worth no more in truth, but only in her heart, than all the bastards had been? Mother scorned her own caution, regretted her concern that so much remained so fragile. But powerful hungers are borne by weak hearts, and she prayed against her doubt that her maternal failings would be forgiven and forgotten when Nightseed split heaven to join his Father in the dark underneath.

I have dared hunger, and I have dared to hunger and to hunt for my soul's meat, and I will endure. Keep soft landings for the soft souls, my Lord, but use me as you will.

She knew better than to seek favor, that the true powers gave nothing but only made use of the useful. Better then to be useful than prayerful, to offer all and ask nothing, to serve and seek no distinction.

My heart, my only Lord and fire, let me always see truth and so be seen on the side of truth. My Lord, that dwells not in darkness but only wears shadow as a flame wears heat. Yet the two are not one. No. Dark, flame, the terrible sunshine. These have no substance, but are only masks for blind fools to probe with small fingers, small minds. Shrouds for dead and embalmed faith. Seeming. Semblance. But I have seen and been seen, and when Nightseed comes, he will also see and he will know beyond doubt. He will refuse the false comforts and he will put aside the veil.

Nightseed. Her fine, strong boy. The shadow may creep, cover the devils that dart and cut with fine finger teeth. All that be cursed. He would live.

Letting go of the chair, Mother grabbed the last of the greasy cat tapers from the small box of stores on the table. Nightseed was strong, but he had lingered too long. Outside her small cottage, the lowland waters had risen early while the spring evenings were yet dark and chill. Her winter stores were nearly depleted, though she gave little thought to food. No, in the nightly contests it was the candles which sustained her, and she had burned too many these past several evenings in the hope that she might keep away the shadow and that Nightseed would be born. Yet he lingered, and his prolonged quickening had consumed her, left her body weak and longing. Now with the birthing pains upon her at last she had no more than an expiring stub and one last candle to burn against a roomful of hazards. Already the shadow lurched across the walls and licked at her feet.

The greedy finger teeth. The dry kisses, my bastards.

Mother held her breath, touched the new wick to the nearly burned down stub. When it took, she smiled in the guilt of her pleasure, though she knew her Lord was jealous and counted every slight. These candles, these little light-crimes, might be the price of her life and the life of their son. Or so she feared, but fear and caution were weakness, to be temporarily cleansed and permanently forsworn. She may be forgiven, but she would never be spared.

What must be, must be. The next contraction spread across the small of her back, forcing her to lift the now bright taper high as she bent forward to ease the pain. *The now pain, the next pang. He will do as He will.*

At the height of the pain she felt her nipples harden again, this time with heat and a rising flush. Her last cleansing had come beneath a full and cloudless moon, its blue tinge upon her skin deepening to purple as the welts rose. The taste of the silty limestone beneath her body and the salty blood where she had bit through her tongue and lips had recalled to her the siring, the summons of her Lord. Once favored, she was expected to ever rise toward Him. But it was a difficult. She stumbled often and relied too much upon flame and fire against the little devils and their covering shadow. Yet contrition was the lash of grace, and each cleansing she endured cleared away the chaff of her soul for fresher and deeper sowing. She doubted she might ever be pure, though she dared to believe she was worthy.

The siring. The seed sown then had thrived within her, taken root and drawn heat and a blood hunger from her body. From her previous barrenness, or because of it, Nightseed had reaped great strength and lashed her to his will. He pushed, drove her leg and loin over stone and earth as his Father had done. The intent of the Father coupled with the will of the son to make her a new creature. She glowed with heat. Passion and duty had thus at last made her fully a woman and mother--a true and the only kind of a true mother, being at once

the root and stem of legacy and right place.

It had not always been so.

Filth, little ones. Suckling finger teeth and shallow--no, blind! Blind eyes. Weak. Poor. My bastards. Shamed be their quickening and their carriage. Mother shook her head and ducked as if beaten by the memory.

Her bastards. Her trials. The fruits of lesser beings, they were true enough to their heritage. *Yes, a heritage of poverty, of desperation and slavery.* First among these least was the one she after called Sod, who alone among the bastards was born of a man and whose first cry rang with man's yearning for breath and touch. And truly she had touched him, though it lowered her. Sod had carried lightly and high, and had clambered fitfully for suck when brought to the stone. Yet weak as he was, he made fit tribute and the milk unspoiled by his lips had risen soon after for the first of the Town Man's bastards.

The stabbing pain of another contraction nearly doubled Mother over, in belated chastisement of the pride she had felt when the Town Man had first possessed her. Tenuous and cold, brittle and spent with old fire he had come from out of the close drawing twilight beyond where Sod's body lay, dressed for the foxes and the red crested vultures. With the heavy poise of a blind man he had crossed the small yard to stand outside her window.

"Girl," he had said, "girl. I've heard your song, seen you in the moonlight. Let me in, I know the way."

Mother had turned away, thrown herbs into the fire.

"The blade rings, there is heat. The blood drips, echoes a heart that would live. You have not done. Let me in, we will clear the path."

She made no sign, but her doubts spoke through her. Was the offering not enough in itself? She heard the insects crawling over the body, the soft feet pacing near, waiting. Soon teeth would bite, the body would not stay whole.

"There is time to act, but none to waste." The Town Man had hung slightly forward into the window. Mother had sensed and doubted his hunger, but lacked wisdom. "Come," he said then, "to the child." When she heard him turn from the window, she followed.

In the darkening moon rise, the Town Man had shown her those devotions which transformed a sacrifice into an offering. The sacred repose, the laying out of choice meats. The underspoken prayers and the self-wounding. To herself he was the Town Man because he'd come from the direction of the last house and knew of deeds done and the names of the doers, but he was never such a creature as those poor, pale figures. By signs was he revealed. The Town Man was within himself and apart, and he was strong but not complete.

Had she known indeed how false and tenuous he was, and had she possessed wisdom, she could have made a beginning of his first instructions and been done. But she was easily flattered, and erred to think that awareness of her own ignorance amounted to total ignorance. By small secrets and visions he enticed her, trapped her will in his fledgling spirit.

But so weak and so lost he was. A grain caught in a failing wind. But I was seen. My strength grew. In time, through couplings and offerings, the Town Man had grown stronger and more present. And as his hunger reached into hers across a void of sense, she was for a time charmed and deceived by pride.

Not to stand by but between me and our true Lord. A mere vapor, tonguing vanities to shame me on the field of my body. Yet I grew, and grow.

In addition to securing her will, the Town Man grew strong on the fortifying blood of their spawn, delivered and devoured upon the stone. Hot with the heat of their children thus consumed, he returned always too soon after the sacrament to sire another and another. In time she perceived his true intent.

But long had she lingered in ignorance, even believing herself blessed. And however weak the Town Man had been at the outset, his seed ever brought forth the fruit of sacrifice. Mother frowned to recall the first of his bastards--a girl child, a scrabbling and pockmarked creature who had sipped a moment of life and howled once before falling silent to the stone.

They always howled. They always cried. Smiling now, she nodded to herself, remembering how the cry of each bastard was so strange and so unique. *They were quieted, soon and quickly. But never too soon, and never too quickly for me. He insisted. Let them breathe night air, let them know brief comfort. So much more cruel the stone, then, so much more rage in the ruptured soul. So nutritive, so delicious. Such lies.*

Those were wilted days, though they had seemed lush. The silent fight engaged, yet the way was clear even then. Couple and quicken, bear and deliver. With small faith and unknowing hope she had sacrificed to what she believed must be, though she knew nothing in truth of night essence or the absolute dark. Ten

bastards given after Sod. Ten times the stone poured forth the running life into the cupped hands of the father. Ten times her bare toe prints dried in a mud of urine, blood and small meats as the Town Man willingly consumed the fruits of his own life force and hers. But their aims were not the same. She strove to pierce the veil of falsehood, while lowly he sought to merely taint the light. Alarmed by her vehemence and the imperatives of her devotion, the Town Man's distrust and resentment of her daring grew. But while his strength increased, Mother tired from use and surrendered often to lust, even after she perceived the danger.

She understood now, more if not all. Truth had come in time, ridden hard into her soul, driven by point and lash as though it were a beast of the Lord's burden.

No rest in truth, no freedom. Knowledge is not a shield against the ignorant but a scythe to cut them down, to never rest, to rise and dare and to strike. And strike. And strike. Having now the sight to see, Mother knew that truth was not a gift but a grief and a debt that was forever forfeit, never paid. With the true vision she had lost the protection of the Town Man, and the lurking hands and the brittle sharp finger teeth had come to bedew the twilight and the shadow like the crystals of frost that stung her feet in the morning. But she could not undo, and would give nothing and surrender nothing to falsehood. There was nothing to give. All of her belonged to the truth and the Lord of truth.

One master, one true Lord. All that is, is but a hand of the Lord, and I am but a finger of the hand. All serve, yet some would be served in turn. Would keep others from truth for blood. But no more will leeches drink from the cup that I offer to my Lord alone. Damned spirit, damned to be.

The pain eased and the memory faded. Mother stood up straight again and began to pace around the table. She knew it went more easily for the sows of the common men, how the birth pangs became easier to bear over the course of years and use. It disgusted her, how little they dared. How little they gained for their sacrifices, bringing forth little maggots to rot in the devouring light. She hated the light. She hated them.

Mother had dared much and learned the cost. The lust of the Town Man was gluttonous and ever-growing. Each of his bastards had been more difficult to carry and deliver, had cost her more and even grew to resist the stone. The twelfth and last was indeed meant to claim her, with the father standing by eager to take the child's form and devour her utterly. Such would have likely come to pass, had she not seen and known and squatted upon the stone, blade ready, to send the child forth in the instant of its crowning. She had won the contest, and the offering was received even before the last of the contractions spilled its placenta to the earth. A dry thing it had been, sinewy and tough, and as the Town Man raged she had burned the afterbirth beneath the corpse, an incense of meat and devotion wafting into the night upon her prayers.

No more, she had begged. And no more had come, as the Town Man retreated into winter's long shadow and barrenness came upon her. Not just in her body, but throughout the lowland sedge where she drank and hunted. Her stores grew lean and her pains abundant, and seldom in the twilight was she ever free from the nibbling kisses of the hidden ones, the disembodied and tender fingers, toes and lips of the bastards now summoned by their own sire to tease and torment her with small kisses and biting sharp nails. Yet she endured, believing but never certain that she was being cleansed once more for higher glories.

Not necessary to be assured, coddled, all that is needed is to dare and strike. Never for me to part the veil, mine only to believe. Mine to succor the One who will ascend beyond faith to certainty. Nightseed. Savior.

Long had that winter been, a lean time of doubt and emptiness in which the spite of her enemy sought to contain her and to close utterly the veil of truth. Tried to keep her from her master, like some jealous, spoiled whore who had been favored too long. Beneath the hateful sun the once sheltering shadow eluded her, only to fall upon her in the evenings to prick with stabbing hunger pains that left her heart beating in her ears and poisoned her blood. Her own warmth and life, spent by the recent and relentless birthing, wasted in the chill air.

Yet every pain proved her faith. Never did she beg relief from the shadowed lances, but with the same knife that had delivered her bastards she had teased, tortured and butchered those creatures most admired by the Town Man, the nocturnal rodents with bright eyes and the warm blooded wild canines that hunt on soft padded feet. Spitefully and with gluttonous heart had she slit their thin throats, presided over their small throes, and lapped the steaming blood from their fur and glazed eyes. In spite she had hung the meat out to spoil in the sunlight after the nourishing blood was congealed and cold, though she might starve even so.

The caul burst. Mother felt the trickling wetness on her leg and reached down. When she brought her finger to her lips, the saline musk running from Nightseed's sac restored her to the needs of the moment. The stub on the table was burning down quickly, fed by the breeze which sifted through the window and which

ran straight to the flame, as though anxious of the shadow.

The Town Man nears. Sends the air fleeing to twist and foil the flame. Ill will in an ill wind.

Mother gripped the candle in her hand even more tightly as another contraction forced her into a squat. The pain was not enough yet for crying out, though for all her suffering none of the bastards had come on so forcefully. But it grew with each contraction, became less delicious and more demanding, and already the spasms followed each other close enough that she barely had time to catch her breath between one and the next. Nightseed was crowning with all the force and fury of his will, and Mother grieved.

Us first, our parting must come. Uncoupled, unbound, my sweet son.

Thoughts of pleasure were gone. As her mind drifted into the birthing space, Mother fed her grief into the fire of devotion and duty. Of course Nightseed would use her to her last. Let him. He could drain her of life and deliver her spirit on his own backside, so long as he lived.

Rising to regard once more the sliver of moon hanging low above the treeline, she steadied her breathing and squatted again, this time only to loosen her body. It wasn't really enough, as common as she knew her pride to be. Nightseed may take her, but she wanted to live, to pass beyond grief and see her son grow strong to his purpose. To see him shame the milk-white men, to reveal the false light and even the false darkness as the dribbling of fools, and cast all such lies through the torn veil.

Victory and spoils, for what the Town Man took and also what he left behind. For long agonies to repay.

Let the weak ones talk of their hungry sun god, who gorges under cover of light upon their guilt and self-loathing. She envied them nothing, especially not their pasty man-children that took sick so easily and were not even fit tribute to the demons of their tepid souls. They cursed *her*. They believed themselves saved! Saved from what? Only the manifest True Born would be saved in life, would ever hope to divine the parting of the veil from the feints of mad and terrible slavery. They knew nothing, but suckled all their small lives on lies and false comforts while they heard--they heard!--they heard and feared and dared not embrace the heat and the blood of the heart that pounded within the mystery.

The heart sounds the depth of the mystery, and blood is the Truth it wields. I know. We know. Their god was just tender crackling at the table of Truth. They were all lost.

Absorbed in her devotions, Mother was blindly pacing when the next contraction took her, stabbing across her abdomen and nearly unbalancing her. She had not been ready for so much pain so soon, and she howled.

As she regained her senses, she stopped and caught her breath with an agonized shudder. The sheltered foes advanced, and she heard the in-breath over tongues and the parched lips parting, sensed the forward feeling finger teeth digging. Her bastard spawn risen and drawn by new blood. They would linger to receive its bidding, to claim Nightseed and grasp him away in a moment of her pain.

Faith, no fear. They return, they lurk in the cold blood-memory and the after-ringing chime of the stone. As though their maker would bring forth my own to tame me. Never mine! No, all for Truth and always to the True, bastards. Bastards. The quick knife and the froth, was all I sought. Dark keep them, I will not have them now. Nightseed only will I own, and endure only by his mercy and his esteem. If I haven't earned that, I won't have these. No!

Reeling backwards, she held the candle high and swung it about, trying to discover the table in the darkening cottage. There was a stub there, there should be a light. Nothing. It was out, knocked over or expired. Neither would do. She must have that much.

Twisting with fear, Mother growled and stabbed with her free hand into the shadow. There was no resistance, just the proof of the small hidden teeth that with quick, stinging malice ripped up the meat of her thumb and struck white heat across her forearm. With a slight tug the gibbering fangs bled her to the elbow. Mother's gaze slid across the crimson slick and her sight fogged with pain.

The next contraction, she had so wanted it, hungered for the tightening abdomen and the grip on her spine. Now it came but Mother was already lost and clumsy in a confusion of agony.

Too much pain, too many kinds. Not all the right kind! Angrily she shook her injured arm and propped it on the elbow, issuing a small jet of blood so close the warmth of it mingled with her breath. Inching backwards from her hip, she sat up into a moonlit squat and focused on the contraction, but she could no longer allow herself to be distracted by the pain. Nightseed was at stake, and truly in danger now.

Take me, son. Strip me of life, cast me off like a cloak before the undeserving world, but come quick and soon. I cannot, cannot, am not strong enough now to bear you alone before these villains.

Her body a spasm, the room rolling around her in confusion, Mother stood squarely in the window. With the bright moon behind her, she was able to regard the room once more with clear sight. There was the table, still on its legs, with smoke drifting lamely from the wick of the nearly spent taper. The space between was treacherously dark, but she had little choice. The candle she held was too weak by itself, the devils would not be fought off with a single flame. Two would not be much better, but it was the most she could achieve.

One way to fight, many ways to fail. I fight.

Her bitten arm was swollen, with little strength or feeling left. Bracing it upright against her distended stomach, Mother pushed her way to the table and swung her body across the space until the stub was in her palm. Arcing the other candle behind her she backed quickly to the window once more before managing to light the stub.

Dear Lord, she begged, remember your child if not your servant. Your seed would thrive, must thrive, but the earth is sick with light and lost in a false darkness.

Crouching, Mother twisted her neck toward the moon outside the window and howled once more, a howl which rang with fear and abandonment. As the contraction deepened and spread across her back and into her soul, the howl became one of rage.

I am worthy, I am. I have given so much and believed so long, alone against ignorance and shame. I know the True Night exists, that fear and darkness and light and love are just idols for simple hearts to worship. Faces fronting forgotten souls, just so. And a face may wear thought, though it has none. No feeling. Only the forgotten soul feels and would be known. There is no sense in darkness or light. No thought, no truth. All in truth resides behind the veil.

*Let me be included, I deserve to be included. Don't, don't leave me alone now. Don't condemn me to the least achievement. Dear Lord, do not let **them** get away and live with their condescension and their terror and shaming ways.* Throwing her good arm out to encompass the far off town, Mother broke off her howl with a moan and wept.

Help me.

Her cry trailed off through the emptiness of the swamp, pushed through the stillness of the evening like a summer storm, all empty rage and violence. The last echoes were still resonating when Mother collected herself and looked up.

She had expected to be overcome, a fast strike and a slow end. Instead, the cottage vibrated with a radiant energy.

Her pulse racing, she scanned the space, plumbing the silence. Turning about as quickly as she could in her weakness and pain, she took everything in. A tingling chill ran down her back, and then she was sure.

He is here. He has come.

Her Lord in Himself had come to the cottage. The tenor and the tone of the darkness announced His presence with the clarity of sung praise. The demons remained at bay behind sharp edged shadows. No longer did they creep into the living space as they had done.

All obey.

Mother let her breath out slowly and began to laugh. She knew herself to be lowly, that He had only come for Nightseed, to shepherd the birth. But the mere fact that He had come at all was a comfort, and she relaxed. When the next contraction came, she indulged herself and honored Him, releasing the candle to expire on the floor and getting down on all fours, growling as though at play. The dampness which clung to her leg from the burst sac cooled her skin like sweat. The growl condensed to a purr, the purr to a moan.

The boy would be crowning soon. Beneath her play the pain endured, and she drifted.

Her Lord had come to her before. She had been alone the other time, too, more alone than ever and pinned beneath the maddening touch of the devils when He had visited her. The sacrifice of the last bastard had damned her, and always when the sun went down the torment had begun. From the shadows the demons touched her, pricking her skin and entering into her with vicious hatred and hunger. They poisoned her blood with cramping pains. She could not remain in the cottage, could neither walk beneath the twilight trees. The shallows and mud pits where she hunted were no refuge. Everywhere the light receded and the shadow threatened. The dark potential, that sense of ripening intent which had first enticed her away from the light now ate at her. In spite of her struggles it fed and fed, her will to resist merely drawing out to a taste what the devils would have feasted upon ravenously, and so been done. But always they fed, she could not stop them. They would never relent until she failed and fell, and they would leave nothing.

And so they would have done, had not the Lord blessed her at last.

He came in the deep winter, found her upon the altar. Perhaps because the sacraments had been delivered there, perhaps because the moonlight struck the stone unimpeded on clear nights, it was the one place where she might sometimes be free of the torments of the devils and the darkness. The stone was cold and stuck to her skin where it was exposed between her rags. She was covered in raw, red marks from the frost and her insides stung with the lancing pains of poison and the weakening winter blood of her prey.

Rolling onto her back to face the moon, she had groaned in worthless pity.

Take me, she had begged, though she had only meant to die.

She had given herself up and begun to drift from consciousness when the fullness began. It was not painful, but neither was it pleasant in the way that the lust of the Town Man had sometimes been. The cold seeping into her body had taken on a pinching quality which traced the curves of her breasts and thighs. She felt a swelling between her legs, but not like a man's swelling. When the Lord took her, it was not as though something indifferent and apart from her had entered. Rather it was the awakening of an essence, some part of Himself forever anchored in her soul to which He now lay claim.

Her hips pushed back into the stone. The pinching sensation gave way to a clawing that ripped across her body. No part of her was untouched. When she began to bleed, the red soaked through and she saw it, hot and intense, rising through the rags.

The poison runs. He is indeed the Lord of Truth and His claiming is a cleansing. He's come, and I am free.

By the time it was over, the moon had set but the dawn was still far off. It had been a painful moment and her first taste of grief. The devils remained, she felt them as a tension hiding just beyond her awareness and hungrier than ever. But beside their hunger and lingering hatred, she now also perceived their fear.

She was afraid, too, though she need not have been. For a time the evenings had been clear and the cottage cleansed of their presence. Until the seed took root, Mother had never felt so bold and secure.

Even so, the demons knew that Nightseed quickened and boldly they came forth once more to kill. Not just her, but him. Here in the merest twilight would be the table leg, tripping her. Outside, the wild dogs and bobcats began to come sniffing at her door, intent in the hunt and drawn by the heat of his blood. And indeed Nightseed was hot, and his blood called the wild with a force which the bastards had never possessed and which would have burned a man-child as the spark consumes the ember.

It was then she had begun lighting her tapers, to contain the shadow and warn away the animals. In darkness her devils opposed her once more, and she stood alone between their victory and the life of her only true son.

Ever then the evenings had grown more dangerous and desperate, but her Lord had never returned. Until now.

Rolling her hips in a wide circle and grunting, she felt the crowning begin. A searing pain shot down her legs and Mother knew she had torn. It was nothing. The pain subsided quickly as the birth came on and she moved back into a low squat, hands between her legs to catch the boy in the final moment and present him to his Father.

Daring the shadow, she edged backwards until she felt the wall behind her. It was dangerous, even now, but she would soon need to brace herself. When the final contraction of the crowning came, she let out a hoarse yell and arched her shoulders back against the rough mortar. With her hands pressed palm flat against the wall she felt the boy's skull pass through her lips and she pushed.

Soon the most difficult moment had passed, yet she dared not look down.

The wind began to gust, a thing of spite come to blow down the curtain and confuse the play of shadow on the floor. The next contraction followed hard upon the gusting and the boy's first shoulder came free.

Another gust. The curtain flapped and fell to the floor. Mother momentarily regretted letting the small candle go out, but it was truly no matter. One more contraction and he would be free, and she would be whatever he left of her. She reached forward between her legs as the next spasm began.

God is here, the child is safe. No candle for my son, no candle for me.

When the expulsive contraction came, she felt the tear rip further, felt the pinching heat of the cut lancing nearly to her anus. Forgetting herself and ecstatic in the pain of it, Mother drew her arms back against the wall, scrabbling at the dry mortar with her fingers. In the moment of her pleasure, Nightseed was born and fell unheeded to the floor. She came to her senses as the cord was cut, felt the weak tug and screamed.

There was no recovery and no chance. Desperately daring even in the presence of her and their own Lord, the demons enveloped her and her son, lancing her body with the finger teeth and the bright flashing

pain, consuming her in her weakness while He hung aloof over all.

Help. Help your son. I'm done, I'm ready. He is just a babe, and my only hope.

She heard a whimpering, throaty cry which might have been her own. Red flashes creased the darkness across her vision and her mind, as the finger teeth pulled off her skin in narrow small strips moistened by the alkaline sweat of her fear and a red underside of blood. Little gobbles covered her, chewing and kissing her body in small welting ringlets. She lost all sense of the room and her place in it, could not tell from any sign where Nightseed was or whether he lived.

Covered in kisses that should be mine! Baptized in his own blood when mine was already given! The gobbles, the finger teeth grabbing him, touching the heat that should burn and thrive and not yield! He should not be touched by these, disgrace of all glory. Dear Lord, help help help.

But the daring sprites gave no quarter, and Mother regained somewhat of sense when her head knocked into a leg of the table. The old stub rolled on the floor, a victim of the fierce hatred. Like her. Like her boy, Nightseed.

She gave a weak, whimpering cry and collapsed, and all became quiet once more.

The gobbles and the smarting kisses stopped. The nibbling teeth quieted their talk upon her skin. Blood dripping down her body cooled in the night air and thickened, she felt it growing brittle and cracking upon her skin. Opening her eyes, all Mother could see was the fine edge of shadow in the stillness. Her heart rang in her ears, panicked still, but the room was calm.

Rising to her knees, she looked around. The room was in two parts. There was the shadow, and then there was nothing.

Shamed ecstasy, my failure. Curse my body, bad pleasure. Alone now in the life in death. Mother doubled over and wept. The guilt and the retribution would come soon, but in the moment she opened herself only to grief.

So quick and too clean, no body to grieve. No littlest hair to hold and mourn and weep tears upon. The bad devils, the hateful ones. Deprive me, spiteful shaming. Not one glance of my son, not a moment for me to look upon his face. But now, now all clarity and bright moonlight and tormenting sharpness. He's gone, he's gone and I'm spent and alone, too far from my own death for hope and too near his for mercy. Spent and alone.

Hoping for comfort or reprimand from the moon, Mother slowly straightened up, turned to the window, and smiled. *No body, no little hairs.* A maternal rush welled from her groin to tingle her scalp and toes. Her griefs absolved in grace undeserved, measureless and mysterious, he was there, silhouetted in moonlight upon the window sill. He seemed about to fly but hesitant, looking at her. She heard his steady breath, saw his nostrils filling with the scents of blood and earth and of his home upon the pitied soil. Then he flew.

Her body weak and trembling still in the afterbirth, she rose and went to see his flight.

It's enough now, if he never returns. More than enough, more than I deserve.

His broad wings extended in relief against the moon, his tail hanging loose and glistening, she felt his eyes upon her still, met his doubt with her pride.

No, you see right my son. I am as I seem, unworthy but graced to be your Mother upon the fragile and frightened Earth. Spare no thought of me now, for your Father protects me and I am His.

She thought that He had come to guard the child, but seeing this child now revealed the depth of her folly and the too near limit of her faith.

A revelation, as the sight of a True Born child should be. Such a fool I was, no better than the man-cows. Yet He came for me, for me! With so little faith in my son and still less trust in my Lord, He came for me even so.

But go now, you go. Seek and find. This little hell cannot contain you any more than I would. Lay a path and be free upon it. Seek and part the veil, for the mystery will fall before you, Nightseed. My fine, strong boy.

The End.

CASE #93436

NIGHTSEED

BY JON WHEELER



Jon Wheeler is a writer, composer, and musician currently residing in the American Southwest. An active contributor to the independent electronic and Creative Commons music scene, Jon's dark ambient, noise, and acoustic works have been used in short films and most notably featured in an exhibition on the Bombe machine at London's Imperial War Museum. All of Jon's works are freely available from the Internet Archive and his website, <http://petalmusic.blogspot.com/>.

Nightseed is Jon's first piece of published fiction.



The Watcher Through
the Window

by S. Alessandro Martinez

Physician: Dr. Edgar
9828-SJE41

#84071

CASE #: 84071



THE WATCHER THROUGH THE WINDOW

BY S. ALESSANDRO MARTINEZ

I KNOW I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO MY INSTINCTS, my initial fear of going down into that place. I should have told him that it was a bad idea to go down there. But foolish pride got in the way, as is the downfall of many. Evan and I were just children at the time. And as most children are prone to do, I felt the need to prove myself to my friend or be laughed at for being scared. This would turn out to be the beginning of our end.

Evan and I were born and raised in the town of Shadow's Path. We grew up as next door neighbors and best friends. I have many fond memories of my life there. I remember jumping in the piles of dry leaves my father would rake up during the fall, of visiting my grandmother just down the street, of going down every weekend to the little cinema run by Mr. Mayfield, and of course spending almost every day with my best friend, Evan. It's such a shame that all those memories are all overshadowed by one haunting, maddening event, the memories of my last summer in Shadow's Path, the last time that I would see Evan alive.

That summer was a gratefully cool one. I had just finished my breakfast of sugary, chocolate cereal one Saturday morning when I heard Evan's unmistakable knock at the door. My mom let him in and he burst into the living room where I had been eating and watching cartoons. Evan excitedly told me to hurry up and get dressed so we could go out, and his enthusiasm was contagious. Apparently he had found something in the woods that he wanted to show me. He gave no hint as to what it was, which made me even more intrigued, so I put my bowl in the sink, got dressed and headed outside with my friend.

We took our usual route down the street and into the vast expanse of dense forest that was that backdrop for our small town. Evan and I had vowed to explore every inch of that enormous, dark woodland. At the time, I do not think we had even gotten around to exploring a third of it. The forest enthralled us. With its thousands of tall trees, cold dank caves, bubbling streams, plentiful wildlife, and an overall eerie, mystical quality, the forest had been our playground and land of adventure for many years.

As Evan and I hiked through a part of the woods we had only just begun exploring that summer, he told me of a dream he had had the night before. He dreamt that he was in a room of complete and utter darkness. How or why he was in there he had no idea. As his story went on, Evan said that he tried to make his way out of the darkness to find the light, but there seemed to be nowhere to go, which put him in a panic. I got a sense of unease and a little chill down my spine as Evan went on about his nightmare. He said that after giving up hope of getting out of the dark, a strange voice began calling to him. The voice was speaking in a strange, almost inhuman language unknown to Evan, but he recalled that he was still able to understand it somehow. He said the voice told him that it, whatever being this voice belonged to, would help him get out of the darkness if Evan took it with him. That is where the dream ended.

My friend continued with his story saying that he had woken up in a cold sweat. He decided to sneak out of the house and take a walk in the woods, as he often did, to get the memory of the dream out of his head. He went by himself knowing that I would still be asleep and that was when he found the thing that he wanted to show me.

Evan's recollection of his dream left an unpleasant feeling in me. But he seemed to forget about the whole thing as we approached the edge of the trees that came out to the side of a craggy cliff. We stood at the bottom of the rock wall and I peered up, inspecting the height of the thing, when Evan called my attention downward. At the base of the cliff there seemed to be a cave opening of some kind that led somewhere we could not see because it was all covered by large boulders and rocks, blocking any entry into it.

And sticking out of that rubble like a putrid flower was black and decayed human hand.

Evan smiled deviously at the surprised look on my face. I had never seen a dead human being before. My shock almost caused me to stumble backwards. I assumed there was more attached to that rotted hand underneath the rubble. Evan pulled out two sets of his dad's leather work gloves from his backpack and handed me a pair. He grinned at me and asked if I wanted to see what else was under all those rocks.

We all have a sense of morbid curiosity. After an initial hesitation, I became intrigued to see the rest of the corpse, if there was one, and to see where this entryway led. I slipped on the gloves and began helping clear away all the heavy debris.

After a few hours, Evan pulled out a rock, causing a little collapse, and a small hole formed in the center of the rubble. He brought out a flashlight from his backpack and bid me to follow him with a nod of his head. I watched as he disappeared into the inky blackness, and he called back to me to hurry up unless I was a chicken. I was hesitant at first, but the urge to prove that I was unafraid overcame my resistance and I followed him in.

We were in a tunnel. At least that's what I assumed from what I could make out. It was complete darkness in there except where the white beam of Evan's flashlight hit. He aimed back at the wall of rocky debris we had crossed and there was the lower part of the corpse. Its tattered legs were sticking out from underneath a boulder at odd angles, having been crushed from the weight of everything, and I felt a little nauseated. We stared at those grotesque legs for a good while, both of us taking in the sight of the first dead person we had ever seen.

When Evan put his hand on my shoulder I nearly jumped into the air. He just laughed softly and said that we

should see what was at the end of this tunnel. I agreed, taking one last look at those limbs, and started after him. We walked for several minutes in the darkness, following Evan's beam of light. We seemed to be walking at a downward slope. The air felt cooler and there was a dampness in the air.

The tunnel eventually led us to large cavern. Evan let his flashlight roam around what seemed to be a cold, cavernous, and circular room that was definitely not a natural formation. There were drawings on the rocky walls depicting human shapes along with very inhuman ones in violent situations, which gave me the chills. There were also several shelves and what looked like altars of a dark blue stone along the walls, with many strange and disturbing instruments upon them, composed of wires, hinges, levers, and blades, made of a metal so black that they ate the glow of the flashlight rather than reflecting it. Many of them had unsettling, deep red stains on them. In the center of the room was an altar much more intricately designed than the others, with numerous paintings, etchings, and glyphs on it, and large enough for several people to lie upon.

And right on top of the center altar was an elaborate stand with a strange artifact placed within it.

When I first laid eyes upon that object I got a nauseating chill through my entire body. The object was a black metal sphere of sorts, but with many carvings, protrusions, and indentations on it in patterns that seemed to make no sense at first glance, but became clearer and even ominous the longer I stared at it. Whatever man carved this must have been exceedingly mad, for the very sight of that thing made my skin crawl.

Evan, on the other hand, was fascinated by the artifact, entranced almost. He just stood there with his eyes firmly affixed to it. From what I could tell in the very limited light, it seemed that his lips were moving, as if whispering to himself...or perhaps to something unseen.

Even in the coldness of the room, I began to sweat. Everything in here seemed wrong, not to mention there was a corpse up by the entrance. I was about to say something to Evan when a small gust of wind began to fill the room. My mouth froze before I could utter a word. I swear I could hear something that came and went with that wind. It was as if there were faint voices on it, if they could be called that, for they were not speaking any language that I knew. Obviously I did not know every single language on earth. But what brought a chill to my bones was that these voices spoke words that sounded like they could not have even been made by a human tongue.

A sudden loud crash of rock against rock finally brought me to my senses. My head instinctively turned toward the source of the sound. I feared that the hole we made in the debris pile might have made the whole thing unstable and was beginning to collapse. I heard a rumbling growing closer when a boulder bigger than I was came careening down the tunnel and smashed into a nearby wall. I grabbed the flashlight from Evan, who was still staring at the strange metal sphere, for I heard the sound of something else sliding down. I pointed the flashlight toward the tunnel. A few smaller stones tumbled down, and along with them came the dislodged corpse. I shone the light upon it and almost lost my breakfast as I saw that not only was his head partly crushed in from being buried by rocks, but also that the skin on his entire torso and face had been removed, as if neatly sliced off with a knife or some other sharp object.

I stood there frozen in fear when another boulder came down straight at us. My adrenaline kicked in and I managed to grab Evan by the shirt and pull him out of the boulder's path. It smashed into the wall causing the whole room to shake violently. I heard the whole debris pile above shudder and begin to give way. I decided that it was definitely time to leave. I went to grab Evan again but he was gone. I waved the flashlight around and saw him hunched over the center altar. I jumped to my feet, grabbed his arm, and ran up through the tunnel avoiding the incoming rocks as best as I could. Thankfully the dislodged rocks had made the entrance bigger, but with all the boulders rolling down at us, I had to use all my willpower and reflexes to get out of their way and to pull Evan up with me.

I finally made it to the surface as my legs gave out and I collapsed with Evan onto the forest floor. A puff of dust blew up from the tunnel entrance behind us as the last rock rolled down and settled. I crawled over and shined the flashlight down. Further down, the large rocks and boulders had stuffed up the tunnel once again. I was grateful to have made it out and to not have been trapped in there forever among those malicious-looking instruments, that wretched corpse, and that disturbing artifact.

I looked behind me to see Evan rising to his feet and putting on his backpack. He helped me up and said that we should head home. He had a strange look on his face and acted as if nothing had just happened as we walked all the way home in total silence. When I got home I made no mention of the day's events to my parents. I just cleaned up, ate dinner, watched some TV, and then went to sleep.

The next day I went next door to Evan's. His mother let me in saying that I could go upstairs to Evan's room, but that he wasn't feeling too well. I nodded and headed up to his room. After knocking on the bedroom door and calling out to him, Evan said to come in.

I opened the door and found Evan lying on his bed staring at the ceiling. I asked what was wrong; he looked like he hadn't gotten any sleep. He just mumbled to himself as he gazed upward. I walked over and shook him a little and asked again. He stopped mumbling and looked over at me with weary eyes. His gaze locked onto me and he began saying that he should not have taken it. I asked him what he meant. But he kept repeating in a sorrowful tone that he shouldn't have brought it home with him.

I wasn't sure what to think until I saw it. The black metal sphere with the weird carvings and indentations on it from that dark cave room was there on Evan's desk. He apparently had taken it with him during our narrow escape. That feeling of chilling nausea washed over me again as I stared at it. Why had he taken it?

I turned back to look at Evan and asked him why he had brought it home with him. But Evan's gaze had returned to the ceiling, although his words had changed. Now he was saying something about a creeping watcher. Something had been apparently watching him through his window all night long. Something with yellow, inhuman eyes, he said. He could not make out any more detail than that in the darkness. I wasn't sure what to think of this. Perhaps, I thought, he just had had a nightmare relating to our ordeal the previous day.

This went on for several days. Evan never came to visit during that time; I always had to go to him. And every time I went over, I found him in his bed staring at the ceiling and mumbling. His appearance became worse over the days, as if he hadn't been sleeping or eating at all. His mother had called the doctor over one day, but he could not find anything wrong with Evan except a lack of sleep and a severe drain of energy affecting his physical and mental capacity. The doctor prescribed food and rest.

One night, as I was in bed trying to sleep, the wind had decided to pick up. I could have sworn I heard a faint, unintelligible voice coming and going with the wind. A fear went through me as I recognized the strange words from the cave. I sat up and rubbed my eyes, hoping that it was just my mind playing tricks on me. I turned my head to look out my bedroom window and my eyes went wide. Across the yard at the house next door, I could see Evan standing at his bedroom window on the second floor, staring out. He looked sickly and frightened. But the cause of my fear was the dark figure attached to the side of his house, just above his window and staring right at him. The thing was cloaked in shadow, but I could make out a thin body with long, spindly arms and legs. I wanted to scream and yell to warn somebody and to bring attention to that thing, but my throat had tightened in terror and I could not utter a sound.

As if sensing my gaze upon it, the creature turned its head my direction and stared at me with yellow, inhuman eyes.

I quickly dropped to the floor, hoping the thing hadn't seen me. This had to be just a dream, a very bad dream. I would eventually wake up in my bed, go over to Evan's and see that everything was alright. After what seemed like an hour, I gathered up the courage to take the smallest peek outside my window. I lifted my eyes to peer outside. But there was nothing.

There was no sign of Evan at his window. And thankfully there was no sign of that thing that had been crawling on the side of his house. I breathed a sigh of relief as I sat down on my bed. I wiped some sweat from my brow and felt my breathing beginning to slow down. I told myself it had just been my imagination. But I still didn't get much sleep that night.

The next morning I woke up to sirens and shouting. I jumped out of bed and ran to my window to see police

cruisers and an ambulance at Evan's house. I got the worst feeling in the pit of my stomach. I put on my slippers and ran down the stairs and out the door, making my way to my friend's house. I saw Evan's mother crying loudly in the arms of his father outside, surrounded by police and onlookers. I ran past them and into the house as a policeman shouted after me. I ran up the stairs as quickly as I could and burst into Evan's bedroom.

I stood there in utter horror at the scene which lay before me. There was blood everywhere, all over the walls, ceiling, and furniture. And there was Evan, pinned to the wall, his hands and feet held in place at odd angles like some sort of unholy crucifixion by strange metal instruments that resembled those that I had seen in the cave room. His mangled body had numerous lacerations across it and above his head, written in blood on the wall, were markings and characters like those we had seen down in that accursed room. But there was one thing that disturbed me above all else:

Evan's face...was gone.

The skin on his face appeared to have been sliced and peeled off. The muscles and bone could be seen and I promptly vomited.

Two police officers burst into the room shouting that I shouldn't be in here. Their sudden entrance surprised me and I jumped backwards, bumping into Evan's desk. I saw something begin to rock and fall out of the corner of my eye, so I instinctively reached out and caught it. It was that damned metal sphere.

The policemen quickly ushered me out, paying no attention to what I held in my hand. I stared at the strange and repulsive object as I was led outside into the yard and into the arms of my parents who had come over to see what was happening.

That summer was the last time I saw Evan alive. But not the last time I saw Evan.

It had been years since my traumatic experience. My parents and I moved away from Shadow's Path. I grew up in a new neighborhood, went to a new school, and spent years going to a therapist. But nothing could make the memories of that scene fade from my mind.

I kept that dark spherical relic with me all these years, even as I grew into an adult. I do not know why. I wanted to get rid of it, but something inside my mind would not let me. It was if an unseen force made me keep it. The most I could do was lock it somewhere deep inside my house, hoping it would one day be forgotten and lost.

One night I awoke in bed after a fitful night of terrifying nightmares. I sat up feeling a chilling nausea wash over me. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and was about to reach for the light switch when I heard a tapping at my bedroom window along with the faint sound of familiar indecipherable words. I slowly turned my head toward the noise and I felt fear grip my heart.

There was that dark figure that had watched my friend through his window, now staring at me through my window with its yellow, inhuman eyes. In the moonlight I could see its facial features, which were weathered and decayed after so many years, yet still recognizable. It wore Evan's grinning face, and in its black, grotesque hand it held sharp, metal instruments that I remember seeing pinning my friend to the wall so long ago. The window began to slowly open and I screamed and screamed and screamed.

The End.

CASE #84071

THE WATCHER THROUGH THE WINDOW
BY S. ALESSANDRO MARTINEZ



S. Alessandro Martinez has been previously published in the online horror magazine Deadman's Tome. He loves to write fiction, especially horror, and hopes to one day have a career in writing. Some of his inspirations include H.P. Lovecraft, Clive Barker, Joseph Delaney, and Brian Lumley. He lives in Southern California with his girlfriend.



Irrelevant

by James Park

Physician: Dr. Roundtree
8245-AVD12

#12690

CASE #: 12690



IRRELEVANT

BY JAMES PARK

HELEN LAREAUX DIDN'T BECOME THE STAR ATTRACTION at the Venus Room because she was bold. She didn't elbow her way into the spotlight. And she barely shed an ounce of her modesty. But weekend after weekend, the club scheduled her as their closing performance, and the seats were always full.

She wasn't a veteran adorned with stretch marks and sun-stained skin. There wasn't a tattoo on her body, or a piercing on her face. She didn't thrust her hips in mad fury, or provide even the slightest indication that she had experience fornicating in public.

Save for the rotating cast of gentlemen that joined her center stage atop the velvet bed, she hadn't fucked anyone for the spot: not the floor staff, not the managers, not even the owner. She didn't talk to the customers. She didn't try to make them feel at home in the seedy venue where sins of the flesh are displayed under the guise of erotic art. And she avoided eye contact at all cost.

Still, Helen LaReaux had her name plastered across the marquee. Her picture was in the window. It was a timid snapshot taken from behind, showing nothing more than her bare back, with her head turned to the side, revealing just a hint of her shyness.

Helen LaReaux didn't strut out to the velvet bed with confidence, toss her robe aside without a care, and leave her goodies on display while she waited for her partner. That was part of the attraction. There was bashful reluctance when she slipped out of the silk robe, and an uncertain terror rested noticeably atop her soft face. When her partner slid inside, she'd bite her lower lip, widen her eyes, and hope for the best. As the act proceeded, the uncertainty would slowly evaporate, gradually being replaced with prolonged moans of approval. As her pale flesh came alive with angelic glow, she'd dig her nails into the gentleman's back, as if struggling for her life. She'd move her head around, tangled hair bouncing from side to side, mouth agape as the moans grew louder and louder. With eyes closed, arms helplessly tossed to either side, the final moan always mutated into a shriek, loud enough to raise the dead. And then she was quiet. The ensuing silence was deeply uncomfortable: for her, for her partner, and most notably for the audience. She'd hold her dainty arm in front of her small breasts, and keep her legs together while slipping back into the robe. She never looked at her partner, and she never acknowledged the presence of spectators.

While the audience smoked their cigarettes and sipped their bourbon, it didn't feel like they were watching yet another simulated performance hacked together by tired professionals. It wasn't redundant dribble that should have been captured on film, then stowed away on a dusty shelf in the backroom of a roadside truck stop.

The audience felt like they were watching an act that wasn't intended for their eyes. It was special. Their search for sleaze had led them to a dimly lit venue that catered the defilement of wholesomeness, and only hinted at the awakening destined to follow.

Every blushing performance from Helen LaReaux seeped with a purity that should have been fleeting, but the purity returned week after week. She was shy. She was timid. She was awkward. She carried a beauty that didn't give way to vanity, an alluring persona that refused to relinquish curiosity and accept vulgarity.

She was young. She was sweet. She was succulent.

She was too good for the lifestyle. And most importantly, she was innocent.

It kept the customers coming back. It made them feel privy to the golden moments of her sexuality. But the innocence of Helen LaReaux didn't stop the Torso Killer from following her home one cold November evening. It didn't stop his eyes from positioning themselves atop the lustrous brown hair covering the back of her head. And it didn't stop her from feeling the weight of his eyes, or shivering at the resultant chills.

She walked at a brisk pace, weaving in and out of freaks that loitered alongside the forum of sex shops and peep shows. She cut corners, crossed against moving traffic. But he followed.

He watched her climb the fire escape outside a graffiti-covered building. He waited on the far side of the street while her apartment lit up. Her silhouette bobbed in front of the washroom window. Even in the confines of her personal space, she removed her clothing with the same uncertainty that she displayed on stage. Then she stepped behind the shower curtain, concealing her shadow from the view of trailing eyes.

The Torso Killer entered the building at a casual pace. His heartbeat accelerated. He relished in the anticipation. But the rest of his body remained calm. He'd done this before, many times.

He knew what floor she was on, which side of the building she occupied. The sound of running water only flowed from one apartment. She was still showering when he slipped inside. Pulling back the curtain, the moment played as expected. Helen LaReaux was quiet. Her body turned cold and froze like an ice sculpture. Her face held greater terror than she'd ever exhibited on stage. Her eyes widened. Her lips quivered. But her shrieking-moans didn't follow; only the silent abandonment of survival.

He turned off the water, then positioned his gloved hand atop her head and grasped a fistful of wet hair. Holding the head steady, he placed the blade beneath her ear and sliced open her neck with one slow and prolonged movement. Life gradually drained from her eyes. He watched every moment of it. Even when she clutched the open wound with scarlet hands and coughed up globs of blood, he kept a tight grip atop her head, and peered into her drowning eyes.

Then she was nothing.

He carved out her torso with the precision of a surgeon, as though he'd spawned from the ancestral lineage of Jack the Ripper. The public had already noted a similarity in victims, and the press was already touting his

reputable skill. But only detectives privy to the crime scenes pondered the vampiric possibility of a perpetual existence. *What happened to the heart? And did someone slurp a fountain's worth of blood from the open wounds?*

Helen's intestines were left in the living room, arranged in the spelling of *Hell*. A kidney was discarded in the kitchen, atop a cutting board with a clean butcher's knife resting to the side. Her liver was later mailed to the authorities.

There was little doubt that the Torso Killer needed to find a new stomping ground. The police would wise up if he continued hunting prey from the Venus Room. They'd start harassing the customers, ask the doorman if he remembered who was there on specific nights. Then they'd narrow it down by stereotype, asking themselves how many of them looked like killers. They'd consult their colleagues over who was the most depraved, most capable of bringing hell to earth. And then they'd lock them up in isolated cells, find out which of the bunch couldn't survive without the sweet nectar of lifeblood.

It was time to move on. There'd be other women, and plenty of them. It didn't matter if the Torso Killer ever found another victim as innocent as Helen LaReaux. Her acts were dirty, and her death was trivial.

The End.

CASE #12690

IRRELEVANT

BY JAMES PARK



James Park is an American writer of horror, sci-fi, and bizarro fiction. He's been a recurring contributor to Night to Dawn Magazine, Massacre Magazine, Cemetery Moon, Sanitarium Magazine, and Infernal Ink. His circuspunk endeavor, Clowns with Big Floppy Shoes, can be enjoyed for free in Issue 2 of Crab Fat Literary Magazine. New work is scheduled to appear in The Realm Beyond, Disturbed Digest, Trysts of Fate, and Pure Fantasy and Science Fiction. He will also be featured in the upcoming anthologies ATTACK of the B-Movie Monsters: Alien Encounters, NovoPulp 2014/2015, Welcome to the Future, Once Bitten, Indiana Crime Review 2014, and the Secret Life of Ghosts.



Tears in the
Gathering Mist

by Jon M. James

Physician: Dr. Peterson
8268-WCT29

#52071

CASE #: 52071



TEARS IN THE GATHERING MIST

BY JON M. JAMES

The alpine lake glistened as the first rays of morning sun penetrated its dark depth. In the primal quiet, a mirrored image of the tree-clogged mountainside rising above its shore split the panorama. As the sun's radiant energy warmed the surface, a white mist began to form—moving across the lake in ghostly tendrils until at water's edge, it rose, snaking through the pine forest like damp smoke.

An old Kingfisher sat on a snag overlooking the glassy water, waiting patiently for a trout to surface. The chilled moisture formed dew causing the beautiful predator to ruffle the dampness from its feathers periodically. Uncomfortable, yet unperturbed, it watched ever vigilant, knowing that breakfast would presently be served.

Sara McClure sat breathless on the rim of a shaded overhang high above the lake. She dabbed at the rivulets of sweat running down her face with absorbent cotton wristbands, grateful to be out of the sun. She leaned back, dangling her aching legs over the edge as a welcome breeze washed over her heat-stressed body.

Traversing the bolder strewn geology of the mountain had been arduous. Sara checked the readings on her new Suunto code watch. The precision instrument was pricy, but necessary, given her spontaneous predilections for free climbing. The readouts indicated an altitude of 4,287 feet, an air temperature of seventy-four degrees Fahrenheit, and humidity of eighty percent.

"Christ, it's actually getting hotter as we get higher," she yelled down to her companion a hundred feet below. Sara shaded her eyes and watched Ramona Weber, her lifelong friend, deftly stretch her arms, find a finger hold, and pull herself up a near vertical slab of shattered granite, the last of hundreds littering the mountain under Sara's lofty perch. Even though she rarely used climbing aids herself, she had hammered in a few pitons to help her friend with the added weight of an overnight stay on the summit. Satisfied with Mona's progress, Sara turned her attention to the angry looking clouds forming in the south. She estimated the storm to be less than an hour away, its dark thunderheads promising to be a gully-washing light show when it hit.

The two second-year graduate students had spotted the mountain's sheer rock face from the bush plane taking them to work in one of the area's summer fishing camps. This mountain, unlike all the others, had its spire mysteriously lopped off at 4,300 feet. Like most inquisitive geologists, when Sara and Mona saw the geological oddity, they vowed to make the climb before summer's end.

Sara was a year older, six inches taller, and forty pounds heavier than petite Mona, which inevitably made her the mule when it came to climbing. She carried the tent, sleeping bags, and most of the firewood. Sara dropped her backpack and dug out two sandwiches. The least she could do was have lunch ready when Mona pulled her sweat-drenched body over the rim and flopped spread-eagle on the hard basalt. This was their ritual, giggling like schoolgirls, grateful to be near another summit.

"We made it," Sara said, handing Mona a spam sandwich and a grape Nehi.

"Yeah, but I still think making this climb with a storm coming was not the smartest thing we've ever done. Side trips are fine, but this is major, and nobody knows we're here, Sara."

"Yeah, well, here we are, so stop with the negative, will ya?"

Mona took a bite out of the sandwich and grimaced. "God, I'm sick of spam."

Sara sighed. "If we could afford anything better than spam, I would have packed it. I'm sick of it too."

"Okay, okay, I'll stop. Let's just be careful."

It took two power-hiking days to get to the base of the mountain, and a six-hour climb to reach the four-thousand-foot level. The traditional animal trails were strewn with boulders, forcing them to zigzag. Nearing the summit, the shattered rocks grew to the size of small buildings. Exhausted after the muscle-trashing ascent, the girls rested on the first piece of flat ground since sea level. There they regrouped, watching the rumbling shoal of charcoal clouds approach. Soon they would experience firsthand the one life-giving element that sustained a rain forest: water.

Sara was first to hear the peculiar sound—an eerie, repetitive clicking becoming louder, then receding as freshening breezes eddied about the overhang. The strange sounds, combined with a sudden chill caused by the low-pressure cell moving onto the mountain, prompted Sara to investigate. She moved to the back of the overhang and listened. Several elongated slits in the basalt caught her eye. No larger than sparrow holes, they appeared to extend deep into the rock. The clicking echoed again, this time with a definite organic cadence. Sara glanced at Mona who had also stood and walked to the back of the overhang.

"You hear it too?" Sara said.

"Yeah." Mona frowned, cocking her head, "sounds like...an old time telegraph key tapping out Morse code." After a moment, she raised an eyebrow. "Or clicking claws?"

Sara dug into her waist pack and brought out her father's army-issue Colt 45, holding it limply by her side. She never ventured into unknown territory without it. The big gun gave her hundred-and-thirty-pound stature a three-hundred-pound security blanket.

Mona grinned. "What do you think is in those little holes, Sara? Rabid weasels?"

Sara ignored her friend's sarcasm and gave the alcove another cursory search.

"Look at this, Sara." Mona held up a chip of black rock infused with white blotches.

"My god. Is that obsidian?"

"Not just obsidian, but snowflake obsidian," Mona said. "The walls are covered with it, literally."

Mona chipped at another area, higher up, and a five-inch-long, half-inch-thick slab fell to the ground. Sara picked up the shard and examined it carefully. The inside surface was smooth and held a greenish-black sheen pockmarked with white blotches indicating that the feldspar and quartz crystals embedded in the granite had somehow been liquefied and cooled rapidly. The outside was pitted and oxidized by humidity and wind. The entire face of the cave and its approach were encased in a thin sheet of the melted granite.

"I told you there was something unique about this mountain," Sara said. She beamed with excitement, speculating on the event that might have caused the odd formation. "When the meteor hit, the area must have been superheated to at least three thousand degrees. There was a quick melt, an even quicker solidification, and *voila*, a thin icing of glass. Come on, let's check out the mesa. Twenty feet to go."

"I'm with you, but it's going to start raining...no, pouring," Mona said. "Why don't we set up camp here for tonight? It's dry and there's plenty of room to vent camp fire smoke."

"Okay, let's do it," Sara said, already unpacking the two-man tent. "I am tired of carrying this stuff around, anyway. You make a fire ring for later."

Sara was outwardly excited about the discovery, but the feeling they had entered an unnaturally formed environment remained palpable. In ten minutes, the camp looked as if it had been lived in for weeks. They donned their bright yellow rain ponchos and day-glow red waist packs.

"You look like a clown fish," Sara said as they climbed the last few feet to the top.

Mona giggled. "Safety first. At least you'll be able to find me if I take the short way down." Sara grimaced and kept silent, stifling the morbid connotations of her friend's comeback.

A patchwork mesa consisting of exposed rocks splashed with colorful lichens greeted them. Copses of stunted alpine willow also dotted the landscape—the hardy shrubs were experts at filling in cracks and crannies with their adaptive root systems. The lay of the land sloped downward from where the two girls stood, a drop of a hundred feet at a twenty-degree incline. Sara held her breath as her eyes followed a two-hundred-foot-wide gouge of shattered earth. Resting at the end was a large mass that immediately elevated Sara's meteor theory.

"Wow, you win, Sara...I guess." Mona cocked her head, as if puzzled. "But my analytical brain is telling me something's not adding up. The largest meteorite ever discovered was the Namibia iron core weighing in at sixty tons. This mass was at least thirty feet high, sixty feet wide, and two hundred feet long. A solid object that size should have taken out the entire island, and yet here it is."

A clap of thunder rolled through the blackening sky, and moments later the rains came. The girls edged their way down the slope, stopping occasionally to chip fragments from globular formations undeniably subjected to intense heat. All proved to be formations of obsidian suggesting that a super-heated object of immense size had struck the mountain and melted a path to its final resting place. When they stood beside it, the artifact was the size of a small airship.

The downpour soon became a torrent. Sara, fearless to a fault, peeked over the precipice. The runoff dropped two thousand feet until it turned into a fine mist. She gulped and pulled back, thinking about a crackling fire and a warm campsite, when she noticed a shelf of rock jutting out over the edge. Twenty feet above the shelf, another slab of rock cantilevered even farther out over the rim, creating an unnatural awning. The lower shelf made a sharp turn and disappeared around an outcropping. Being fearless and somewhat foolhardy at times, this odd formation was too much for Sara's inquisitive mind to ignore. She stretched out on the shelf and crawled on her belly until she could peek around the corner.

Looking up, Sara could see the cantilevered slab sloped downward at a fifteen-degree angle while the slab she clung to continued around the outcropping, appearing to end directly under the overhang which seemed to defy gravity. Several birds seeming to enter, then exit the vertical wall, made Sara think there might be a cave invisible to anyone except those looking up from the base. Fearing nothing of the two-thousand-foot drop or the capability of the suspended shelf of granite to hold her weight, Sara continued to slide out over the abyss.

"Jesus, Sara," Mona yelled over the pelting rain. "Be careful."

Tense minutes passed before Sara's muffled voice broke through the curtain of rain. "It's okay, Mona. You're not going to believe what I'm looking at. It's a cave, and it's huge."

"Dammit, Sara, you're going to be the death of me," Mona mumbled. Not nearly as confident as her curious friend, but always game, Mona reluctantly crawled out on the slab and followed her friends coaxing voice. Reaching the end, and seeing nothing but air, she called out, "Okay. I'm here. Where are you?"

"I'm in here. Stand on the ledge and pull yourself up."

Mona stood and her jaw dropped. She was peering into an eighty-foot-wide, thirty-foot-high maw of a massive cave.

"Give me your hand," Sara said, coming out of the gloom. "We just hit pay dirt."

In moments, the two girls were standing near the edge, shining their flashlights into the interior, the combined power unable to penetrate its full length. Like shafts of diffused sunlight, the beams illuminated a coral reef of color, a reef without fish. The environment Sara looked upon was surreal and utterly breathtaking. Calcified layers of bacterial growth covered everything. Small colonies of stalactites hung in the areas where the roof had collapsed and rainwater had intruded. The interior was a jumble of bent, twisted protuberances, some hanging oddly from the ceiling, others leaning against the sides or piled up like anti-landing craft obstacles on a Normandy beachhead.

Sara's eyes darted from beam to twisted beam, her brain calculating the dimensions, the sharp angles, the stunning possibilities, and the equally mind numbing reality of the same conclusion. This cave was not a cave. The undeniable geometric shapes would have given most discoverers at least a chilling notion that the twisted shapes might be artificial constructions, but it was the profusion of metal-loving bacterial growths attached to the geometric shapes that screamed recognition in Sara McClure's well-educated mind.

Mona jumped when Sara began chipping on a relatively straight fragment protruding from a wall. The overgrowth was chalky and brittle. It grew in cauliflower-like eruptions on the beams. A large piece fell to the floor with a subdued brick-on-brick *clunk*. The resulting metallic *clank* of Sara's rock hammer against the solid material underneath was unmistakable. The massive hollow they stood in was not a geologically formed cave, but a mechanically designed structure created by sentient hands. Sara shook her head, not quite able to get her brain around the fact that no man-made object could have survived such an impact. "Intelligently shaped metallic alloys," she whispered, her words taking the discovery to an implausible realm that many had imagined, some had written about, but none had been able to verify.

The girls stared at the alien cathedral for several moments, listening to the echoed *drip, drip, drip* of seeping water splashing into stagnant pools.

"When do you think it crashed?" Mona asked, still inspecting the walls with her flashlight.

"Must have been thousands of years ago. It takes a hundred years for a stalactite to grow one inch." Her light played over a large group hanging close by. "That big one over there has to be six feet long."

"Oh, my god...is that what I think it is?" Mona said, lighting an area under a small ledge. A bleached white object protruded from a pile of fractured rubble. Recognition came like a splash of ice water. It was a femur. Adventurous Sara ducked under the ledge to investigate while Mona began to back away.

Sara flipped over a thin slab of solidified granite to reveal a near perfect skeleton. All of Sara's questions as to whether or not the object was a machine designed by human hands were muted in an instant. This was a ship alien to earth, as was its pilot. The bones were humanoid in structure but that's where the similarity with the hominid form ended. The femurs and tibiae were twice the size of terrestrial bipeds. Sara estimated the creature to be ten feet tall with a frame able to support perhaps as much as eight hundred pounds. Four toes tipped with raptor-like claws suggested a saurian genesis. The skull was massive. Below its two eye sockets, where most terrestrial nasal cavities were located, a pair of horns emerged, each curled like a nautilus shell, ending with air openings near the creature's massive frontal lobes. The skull's serpentine structure and the serrated rows of teeth protruding from its jaws conjured an especially horrific vision of a predator straight from Hell.

"I don't much like this place anymore, Sara. Let's go."

Sara ignored her friend's building trepidations and continued to examine the alien bones.

A strange, yet familiar sound echoed through the room—a metallic *click, click, click*—moving closer, getting louder. Mona moved her flashlight to the upper ledge where the sound was at its loudest. A series of round, tube-like vents half filled with debris, suggesting they may have been conduits, were cut into the wall a foot above Mona's head. A sound like a dog's claws clicking across a linoleum floor echoed in the conduits, and it was getting closer.

"Sara," Mona whispered. "Let's get out of here."

Sara didn't reply, but heard the fear in her friend's voice.

"Shit, Sara, something's coming."

Mona froze as a nightmarish visage appeared from the blackness of the small tube. A creature conjured from Frankenstein's cauldron of DNA leaned over the ledge, its huge spider head bathed in a shaft of light from an opening in the ceiling. Eight lidless, black eyes—four large, four small—fixed their gaze on Mona as she gasped, obviously frozen in fear. Sara watched as the creature postured itself slowly, purposefully, like a feral cat preparing to pounce on a mouse. With strange staccato movements, its six pointed appendages pushed against the walls, causing its bulbous body to protrude like a paratrooper leaning out of a cargo door. Time stood still as the two beings stared at each other, Mona's breathing becoming labored, edging closer to panic as the creature's massive chelicerae began clicking, producing fangs that dripped viscous droplets from serrated tips. Then it seemed to relax, cocking its head, as if listening, calculating.

In that breathless moment of silence, Mona's transfixed state of shock collapsed into a scream so piecing it made Sara cringe. The creature's reaction was immediate and animated. It arched its back, like a startled crab defending against a threat, and began to tremble violently. Then it moved—with shocking speed.

The nightmare leaped, and Mona, still screaming like a steam engine whistle, instinctively stepped back and held up her hands. The house-cat-sized creature landed forcefully on her chest, its forward momentum knocking her backwards. Mona landed hard, knocking the air from her lungs. Gasping for breath, her hands innately grabbed the body of the beast in an attempt to dislodge it. At Mona's first grasp the creature reacted, digging its six front claws deep into her chest. She screamed again, this time obviously in pain, fighting frantically now to throw the creature off her body. In the next instant, the creature raised its hairy head, flexed its two six-inch fangs outward, and plunged them deep into Mona's neck. Mona sucked in a huge rasping breath as her body stiffened and her eyes grew wide. Her body began to jerk like an epileptic having a grand mal seizure.

Less than ten seconds had passed since the creature attached itself to Mona's chest. For five of those seconds, Sara had stood under the ledge, watching the terrifying opera play out, frozen in her own envelope of horror. Startled into action by Mona's blood curdling scream, Sara fumbled in her waist pack and pulled out her father's 45. She took aim without hesitation.

The big gun jerked in unison with a bright flash and ear-shattering bang. The heavy 225-grain hollow point slug struck just below the creature's spiny backbone, exploding from within, spewing jets of yellow cartilage and viscera. It instantly released its grip on Mona's chest, the violent reaction snapping off its fangs as it rolled onto the cave floor and began withering in fits. Sara watched its legs spasmodically curl under its body like a dying fly. In a moment, it was still. To Sara's growing horror, the creature's fangs continued to pump poison into Mona's chest like a bee's stinger torn from its body. There was no need to check—Mona Weber's vacant eyes were already lifeless.

Sara fell to her knees. Her body quivered with the shock of excess adrenaline. As her eyes again focused on Mona's inert body, she threw up, racked by waves of nausea. She wept as her brain fought desperately to cope through the debilitating fog of fear. Her emotions raged uncontrollably for a time. Facial muscles frozen in a mask of terror, tightened into a grimace of unbridled rage, then relaxed, sagging with complete release.

"I'm sorry, Mona. I'm so sorry," she wailed into the silence, but there was little time for remorse. As suddenly as the strange sounds had descended upon the two girls, the *click, click, click* of movement once again echoed through the cave with one terrifying difference. This time, there were many, and they all came together just

above Sara's head.

Sara slowly moved out from under the ledge and looked up. Three heads sprouting twenty-four gleaming black eyes stared back at her, filled with hell-bound malevolence. Faced with certain death, Sara's adrenaline-soaked brain screamed a single thought demanding a single reaction, the irresistible urge to run—and Sara ran.

The cave opening was sixty feet away. Sara's brain raced ahead of her body, calculating speed and timing needed to drop onto the shelf and sprint to the mesa. Halfway there she remembered the gun upon which she still had a death grip. Life or death decisions flooded her mind. Should she turn and face the enemy, hoping to take out several before jumping to the shelf, or should she keep running, hoping to outrun the monsters on her heels? Were they even pursuing at all? She could hear nothing but the wind in her ears. Her decision came with only ten feet left to the rim. The probability of fighting off several of the fiercely determined creatures as she balanced on a rain-soaked, eight-inch slab of wet granite was unlikely. Sara turned, knelt on one knee, brought the gun to eye level, and faced whatever demons might be coming at her from the gloom. Her heart froze when she saw they were nearly on her.

There were three, the leading and largest just six feet away. It leaped, and Sara fired. The bullet amputated all three of its right side front legs and part of its rear. It fell, wriggling in agony. The loss of the larger creature did nothing to slow the two smaller ones. They leaped in unison. Sara's second shot struck the leftmost creature squarely between its eight eyes. It literally exploded in midair. She never got the third shot off.

Sara turned and leaped for the shelf, but the headlong impact of the third creature slammed her to the ground. The gun clattered out of her hand. She watched helpless as it disappeared over the rim. Her outstretched arms found the cliff edge and she continued to pull herself forward. Stabbing bolts of pain produced by the creature's serrated legs clawing into her back did little to deter Sara's forward motion. Survival was an innate human instinct, and the perceived safety of the shelf was now only inches away.

With a last supreme effort, Sara pulled her body to the very edge of the cave only to feel two hot needles of pain push deep into her neck. Sara cried out, not from the pain but because she could no longer move any part of her body, her nervous system was paralyzed. A moment later, Sara McClure's heart stopped. Her last breath was no more than a piteous whimper.

The cave was quiet. Only the echo of splashing rain from the outside world disturbed the silence. In the dank gloom, an eerie keening joined the sound of the falling rain. No other creatures appeared from the conduits, but the cave was suddenly filled with a strangely haunting song, the mournful lament of the last creature alive. It leaped silently from one dead comrade to the next...its alien cries soon an echoing wail of sadness and despair.

In its agony, the distraught being tried to find a reason why it had been so viciously attacked with the pain-inflicting sound waves. Unprovoked and at the edge of consciousness, it had to fight—was forced to fight—forced to kill. Grief-stricken over the loss of its mate and siblings, it stood beside the body of Mona Weber, its desolate keening suddenly transforming into catlike hisses filled with disdain and aggression. At the crescendo of its hissing fugue, the sole surviving creature rested its nightmarish head against Mona's body, dug its needle tipped legs into the ground, and with strength far beyond its size, began to methodically roll her lifeless corpse toward the rim.

In the valley below, the day was ending. The old Kingfisher returned to his snag overlooking the glassy alpine lake. There it waited patiently for a silvery fingerling to ripple the surface. As rain clouds descended once again, a sudden movement from above caused the beautiful creature to look up. Its blue crowned head cocked like a puzzled puppy as a dark object plummeted from the heights, flashing color—yellow and red—landing soundlessly upon the fractured rock pile at the mountain's base. Minutes later, another object fell, similar to the

first. Ending the strange activity, a much smaller object streaked down the mountain cliff, this one erupting like a raindrop on a flat rock.

Intrigued, but unconcerned, the Kingfisher ruffled the gathering dew from its feathers and returned its full attention to the lake surface, watching, ever vigilant as a mist began to form and move in ghostly white tendrils through the pine encrusted mountainside.

The End.

CASE #52071

TEARS IN THE GATHERING MIST

BY JON M. JAMES



Details not released at this time



Who Dwell Among Us

by R.S. Archey

Physician: Dr. Peterson
8268-WCT29

#31730

CASE #: 31730



WHO DWELL AMONG US

BY R.S. ARCHEY

THE LAST LECTURE OF THE SEMESTER WAS BITTERSWEET. To call him depressed was perhaps overstating it, but there was little to cheer him as the students filed out of the room in hushed whispers. The anthropology building would be empty, his office lonely, and the campus was already cold and the trees barren.

Collin was fonder of long-dead places and peoples than he was of the living. To teach one about the other seemed fitting, though it wasn't his true passion. It was his longing to be outside the borders of his country and to get his hands dirty scouring the more forbidding parts of the world that he truly lusted for.

When he reached his office he found the building empty and silent. He made one last check of his desk before departing. The only thing he left behind that caused hesitation was the picture by his typewriter. She wore a golden necklace with a green Irish cross with her perfect smile. It was cheap gold and a cut-rate imitation of emerald. It was what he could afford, however, and she'd worn it ever since. He wondered if she wore it still.

He left campus and took a taxi for the few blocks back to his apartment: meager accommodations tucked away in Hell's Kitchen passed down from his great-grandparents. It lacked for charm, but was paid for, rent-free, and allowed him some spare cash now and again.

He retrieved the half-full bottle of Johnny Walker from a cabinet and a single glass. He sat next to his answering machine and poured two fingers worth. He downed it in a single go and poured another two. He let his hand linger over the flashing button for a moment before pressing play. He'd listened to these messages over and over until he felt he would know them in a foreign language.

The first message was the longest. She'd called him weeks ago, thrilled about the prospect of flying out of the country with her mentor, Dr. Myles Weyland Hughes, to inspect some ruins in Turkey. She and Collin had found common ground in their love for the old and forgotten history of the world, but her future was more optimistic.

Archeology was more her specialty, and Dr. Hughes was a professor of the subject at NYU. His book sales alone were enough to retire on, but he took excessive pride in his knowledge. He would be unable to exist if he couldn't lavish his knowledge upon young minds.

She spoke happily about herself and a handful of his students going for a week to study the Gonur Tepe ruins of Oxus. A four-thousand-year-old fortress in the desert hills of the old world would be like a narcotic to Kate, and he was happy for her. She spoke at length about the itinerary until the message limit cut her short. She never called back until her return.

That message was less enthusiastic due to her exhaustion. She'd seen pieces of history that few others have. She spoke of a second set of ruins that Dr. Hughes' group ventured too that not even their guides knew of, and asked for Collin to come see her the next day if possible. He happily obliged, and remembered how thrilled she'd been to tell him about every detail. They talked for hours about the temples and pottery that remained intact, especially so in the second set of ruins.

"In fact," she had told him, "Myles gave me a souvenir." When she handed him the small stone slab he nearly spit up his coffee.

"Jesus, did he smuggle this?" Collin had asked in disbelief.

She smiled at him. "I don't know exactly, but I'm keeping it!"

To be honest, he wasn't stunned by her decision as she lived for ancient cultures. He, however, would rather forget about the smuggling of ancient stone paintings from a foreign ruin.

When they spoke a few days later she stated her regret at keeping the tablet. She thought that someone may have found out and perhaps the police were watching her. Collin opined that the police would likely be more direct about it. She wasn't convinced.

Her third message came the next day. She sounded distraught and was even rambling. Someone following her, noises in her home, and seeing things out of the corners of her vision. He called her and told her she was being uncharacteristically paranoid, but she sounded truly terrified.

Collin had made another visit to her home before finals at Hunter College came around, wherein he would be too busy to see her again for a while. She looked absolutely haggard. She remained in bed, her eyes sunken and red from crying.

"Kate, what is going on with you?" He'd asked. This was wholly unlike her.

"I'm losing it, Collin." She'd answered, gazing through her bedroom window. "I'm seeing things, I swear. I keep seeing someone following me, but..."

"But what?"

Her eyes began to water and her lip trembled. "They're taunting me. They never say or do anything; they just stand there and watch."

She had likely seen the disbelief on his face. "They stay in the shadows, usually in between buildings or in alleys. Sometimes I think I see them in the hallways or windows..."

Collin left her that day with what little advice he could offer. The next two days she didn't answer his calls and he became worried. He let her alone, though in retrospect he should have never left her side that last evening.

The last message was left just under a week ago. It was little more than quiet breathing and broken sobs. The click that followed her hanging up haunted him ever since. The police looked her home up and down. They wrapped her door in garish crime scene tape and scoured the insides for the smallest bit of evidence. He'd tried to ask them about their findings, but seeing as he wasn't family they refused to offer anything other than, "We're

looking into it." Even offering up her last messages yielded no leads for the investigators.

He continued to press them for answers, but over the course of those few days they offered nothing else. Her family was across the country and had made one call to him asking about their daughter. Collin was infinitely frustrated that he had no advice or help to give her family and the police. That was where he was left now: drinking fingers of scotch and listening to messages.

When he woke up the next morning, he saw that he had another message on his machine. The liquor must've put him under more than he realized as it was left only a few hours ago. The voice on the end was husky, aged, and refined. It reeked of scholarly hubris and sounded soaked with disdain.

"Mr. Darcy, this Dr. Myles Hughes. I understand you and Kate were dear friends. I deeply regret the news of her disappearance. I would like to offer my condolences. If you would like to talk about your friend and find some comfort in your grief, you can come to my address at any time."

The message closed with a street address on Long Island. Mr. Darcy would indeed like to visit Dr. Hughes. He dressed himself and took a look outside his window as he buttoned up his shirt. The multistory buildings stretched out like a sea of brick and metal. Shadows cast a constant nightfall in some of the seedier alleys. Streets ran like folds in gray matter and people hummed and buzzed like neurons during the day and waned into smaller numbers as the warped mind of the city slept at night. She could be anywhere in that mess of civilization, lost among the forlorn and hidden places that lay in the city's subconscious.

He took a taxi to the affluent home of Dr. Hughes. It was a quiet neighborhood and the sidewalks bore only the occasional jogger or dog-walker. Clouds began to hang heavy in the sky and a rising wind blew the cold air about him, making him pull his coat tighter.

He knocked on the door and waited for a reply. He noticed an untouched newspaper dated January 8th, 1986, the day prior, sitting untouched at the corner of the door frame. He knocked again, but to no avail. A gust blew cold air across his face.

"Fuck it." He snapped, and tried the handle. It was open, so he let himself in.

"Hello?" Collin called out. "Dr. Hughes?"

The inside of the home was warm and cavernous. Music echoed through the house and he thought it sounded much like Chopin. The fluid keystrokes were a contrast to the rising feeling of dread that Collin felt as he walked lightly through the house. No one answered his calls and a malicious pall crept over him as he perused the home.

Collin finally made his way up the lone staircase, where the music became louder. He followed it to a room at the end of the hall. The rolling musical notes were now uncomfortably loud. He found a large record player as the source of the music and lowered the volume.

"Pretentious prick." Collin mumbled. The gentleman doctor should get a damn cassette player like everyone else. Lord knows he could afford it.

Collin would never openly confess his jealousy towards the doctor. Hughes had the means to give Kate the things Collin only wished he could, most notably the ability to see the world and its mysteries that she so desired. Though she had no interest in Hughes other than as his protégé, it still added salt to the wound.

As he left that room he started when he saw someone in the room across the hall. He knocked and walked through the open door, but they didn't respond. Fear gripped him, and he approached slowly to see Dr. Hughes sitting stiffly in his chair with a pen held loosely in hand. Blank sheets of paper sat on the ornate desk in front of him. A fireplace flickered softly on the far wall.

Collin reached out slowly, his hand quaking at the thought of rousing the dead. When his hand touched the thin shoulder, he felt the muscles stiffen. Dr. Hughes turned and looked at him with a sullen stare.

"You don't care for my music, Mr. Darcy?"

Collin regarded him coolly, though sweat had begun to bead on his forehead as his heart raced. "You knew I'd come here."

Dr. Hughes' eyes glanced away, out the window, and nodded briefly. Pretentious prick, indeed.

"I knew you would be unable to resist any information on Kate."

"And?"

Dr. Hughes stood and pulled a cushioned chair next to his desk. "Sit, won't you?" He asked genially. Collin obliged, and the doctor went to a mahogany dry bar and brought back two glasses and a bottle. He saw that it was a bottle of sake, and no cheap brand.

Two glasses were filled and one passed to Collin. He'd never had sake before, and he didn't think he would have it again. However, he wouldn't be rude to the man who may know where Kate was.

"So, Kate tells me you study anthropology."

"I teach it; at Hunter College."

Dr. Hughes nodded, his mouth pursing in a way that said, "How quaint."

"Kate enjoyed anthropology. But, she obsessed over archeology." He smiled, staring into his near-empty glass. "I remember when I told her I would be taking her to the Oxus ruins. She screamed so loud I thought security would be called. It certainly turned heads."

"When did you see her last?"

"When I gave her the tablet. A day or two after our return to the States." He looked crestfallen.

It seemed to circle back to that cryptic cut of old stone. Collin had an unsettling feeling about it from the moment she mentioned it. He should have convinced her to return it to the doctor and be done with it.

"Have you ever heard of Catalhoyuk, Mr. Darcy?" Dr. Hughes asked, veering from the subject.

Collin dug through years of mental notes. "Possibly the oldest city in the world; at least what's left of it. A Neolithic proto-city in Turkey that's, what, nine-thousand years old?"

Hughes smiled and nodded approvingly. "Indeed. A fascinating place. The Turks have some outstanding history among their land, such that even they don't understand it all."

Collin frowned. "And you do?"

The doctor must have heard the contempt in his voice, as Hughes looked to Collin and his expression darkened.

"It's not hubris, Mr. Darcy. It's *knowledge*. Horrible, awe-inspiring knowledge. It was in Catalhoyuk that I found the first depictions of them. The drawings were worn and barely recognizable, but after talking with the locals I was shown to a village elder that told me of other ruins near there and summarily kicked me out on my ass. He warned me to not bring such knowledge back to his people and banished me from his village on pain of death. I was ecstatic."

Collin sat his own glass down on the desk. He found himself enraptured by Dr. Hughes' history lesson. The man spoke with such conviction and fervor that Collin could see the doctor practically reliving the events at that moment.

"I found those ruins the elder spoke of, and while my colleagues and guide kicked about the stones and rubble, I found something else. Under eons of dirt and sand was a stone block serving as a door. Engraved on it was the same eerie symbol that I found in Catalhoyuk. I was able to move it on my own, barely, and it exposed a narrow stone stairway below ground. To be honest, I had all but forgotten my present company. I was selfish in my lust for discovery and I followed those ominous stairs into the darkness."

"I'll never forget what lay beneath there. It's branded into the deepest recesses of my subconscious. It's a painful scar that wakes me sweating and terrified in the night. The buried secrets of that place were best left alone, but I pressed on and downward. The air was cold and smelled like something otherworldly. I only had the paltry beam of a flashlight to see the carvings on the walls, hidden though they were behind curling, dead vines. At least, I would like to remember them as vines."

Dr. Hughes shuddered, and Collin saw him pale even further. "I was focused on the pool in the center of that small room." The doctor continued. "It enchanted me, called to me...its dark waters lapped at the side of the stone floor like a living thing. That's when I saw them move. God be good, the vines moved. I met the creature then, and it showed me horrible things..."

Hughes took a long pull straight from the bottle. The doctor then took a key out of his pocket and unlocked a drawer on one side of the desk. He pulled a pile of newspaper clippings from within. Hughes handed him the collection with a shaking hand.

Headline after headline read of one disappearance or another. They were from all over the country, though

many were from local papers in New York City.

"What are these? What does this have to do with Kate?" Collin asked pointedly.

Hughes took another, longer pull. "She was supposed to be a replacement." He said softly, almost in a whisper. "They would have been content with the students. It was no different than my own situation. I had hoped..."

The doctor took a deep, shaky breath. "The Nevsehir ruins...that was the first time I had to bring offerings."

A cold hand clutched Collin's gut. "Offerings?"

"I had to do something soon, or there would be...consequences for myself. I had to make due with some locals. The things wanted an act of devotion. Something to test my understanding and loyalty. I suspect to test my capability as well. There are miles-long tunnels under those ruins, Mr. Darcy. Not wholly undisclosed, as it was a point of interest in that particular site. But, there are other routes that are unknown, and twice the length of the known tunnels. And, rest assured, they hide things nameless and abominable. I was shown a way, through that first 'conversation', to another of those unspeakable pools."

Hughes clenched his fists. Opening and closing them until the knuckles were white. "I had to watch the activities at first, but soon I was able to find a way of providing contributions without such involvement. Knowledge is a wonderful and horrible thing, Mr. Darcy. Millions of years of evolution and man found itself set apart from the animals; a means to express our emotions and discuss the wonderful and unbelievable. We also found our own damnation."

"They're drawn like a beacon to those who know of them. They don't much care for the heat or the light but they will come out in search of what they want when the time comes. When I had to return to the States I was made aware of their presence here as well. I can only assume I'm not the only one of their liaisons. Hence, my intentions for Karen."

"They dwell among us in the dark and secret places of the world. Even here in the country of technological and urban marvel, we have places for them. They still inhabit the ancient forests and deserts of the old world, but even in our own city there are places that have been long forgotten. Stone was built upon stone, and then brick and then metal piled upon that. One of the largest cities in the known world has forgotten doors and halls all its own in which the Descendants lay about and bore their vicious wells to that wretched, gnashing god of theirs."

Collin sat up and sighed in frustration. "Who is 'they', doctor? Who are these Descendants? Do they have her?"

Hughes laughed. It was a dry, humorless laugh that only chilled Collin's insides even further.

"They are not people in even the vaguest sense of the word, Mr. Darcy. People, even down to the most basic of hominids, have only been around a few million years. These Descendants, I like to call them, to which I have been so reluctantly bound have existed for time beyond memory. Their god has lolled about exponentially longer. Knowledge, Mr. Darcy. Knowing that which we never should."

"The last time our little planet experienced a mere modicum of their starving god's hunger, the dinosaurs went extinct. Creatures unrelated to man or beast made the fatal mistake of taking their worship of the Descendants and that gnawing colossus too far. All but the smallest of life was destroyed and consumed by a mere mote of that unspeakable Thing's deprivation. Only ash and bone remained of most of the world."

"That should tell you all you need to know of 'who' they are. Do they have her? I have no doubt. I hoped by giving her the tablet that it would at least spare her. It appears the Descendants had other devices in mind."

"Where can I find her?" Collin asked, his tone aggressive. "What did you do?"

Dr. Hughes reached back into the drawer and removed a thin, plate-sized piece of stone. It was very similar to the one Kate had tried to show him.

"Is that-"

"The very same." Hughes interrupted.

The stone was rough around the edges, showing that it was possibly part of a larger piece. It had grooves and carvings that were painted in faded hues. The carving showed a large eye with three ovoid irises in seemingly random locations. Cephalopodan appendages encircled it like rays of a sun. Collin then recognized that a certain number of the appendages ended in three-pronged claws. The horrific representation was surrounded by numerous, tooth-filled maws of varying sizes.

Having seen such a macabre depiction, a nauseating unease seemed to claim the forefront of Collin's mind. The room itself seemed to darken and he had the impression that he was made party to a more sinister consciousness that was now aware of him.

"What the fuck is this?"

"Knowledge, Mr. Darcy."

"You're insane."

Hughes smiled, and then quickly his expression waned into one of great sadness. "How distraught was she, at the end?"

"At the end?"

"When you last saw her. I'm sure she spoke of things you couldn't possibly understand. Was she crazy, Mr. Darcy?"

Collin looked at the tablet. He watched the fiendish appendages as they seemed to move before his eyes and the gaping jaws chewed at the air. He found his mouth had gone dry and went to grab the bottle of sake when he saw that Dr. Hughes was brandishing an old but well-cared for revolver. It startled him and he almost dropped the stone. He slowly raised one hand in attempt to pacify the doctor.

"Dr. Hughes, think about what you're doing."

"I have, young man. I wish you better luck than I, and certainly Kate."

Hughes' thumb cocked the hammer of the revolver with a sharp click. Collin's breath caught. Dr. Hughes' lip was quivering.

"Oh, God, forgive me..."

He raised the barrel to his chin and pulled the trigger. It happened so swiftly that Collin wasn't even aware of what occurred until the loud pop shattered his dumbfounded stasis with a red spray. The doctor lolled forward, slumped in his chair with a line of blood pouring from his mouth and forming a puddle on the floor. Collin's heart began to race. Someone certainly would've heard that. He looked at the glass that he'd drunk from and the newspaper clippings he'd rifled through. He scooped them all up and threw them into the red-hot coals of the fireplace, starting the flames anew.

He stuffed the tablet in his coat and held it under his arm. He left the home casually to see that the few people wandering the streets paid no attention to him or seemed to be curious about the house. Perhaps they hadn't heard anything? Most likely they did and thought it a harmless noise, not suspecting that a man had just ended his own life within its cursed walls.

As Collin made his way around the street corner he stopped. A sickening jolt caused him to halt and attempt to catch his breath. He felt as though his skin was crawling and his blood had congealed in his veins. He had a powerful urge to take out the tablet and see that it was intact. He resisted, as he didn't want to reveal the morbid slab of stone to anyone watching.

And there *was* something watching. His eyes were inexplicably drawn, and quite directly, to a nook between two houses where the shadows lay deep and foreboding. Something mingled there with the darkness. It was a part of it. It languished in it. It appeared to be hidden by thick, flowing robes that seemed to move in all directions at once. As he looked at it, Collin knew that what lay behind that veiled face was not human. He knew it in his gut and he knew it in the primal space that lay in folds of his mind where his most animalistic instincts dwelled.

Collin turned and walked away. He went the opposite direction to find another bus stop. He felt the gaze of whatever damnable thing that lingered in the darkness following him. He looked back, just before he would lose sight of it, to see it there still waiting. He walked briskly to the stop and waited there with two other strangers for the bus to carry him away from here. Even in the company of other people he couldn't shake the weight of ill omens that pressed on him.

When he departed at his stop, he made for the quickest route to his apartment. The streets and alleys of Hell's Kitchen were painted with far more shadows than the quaint neighborhood of Dr. Myles Weyland Hughes. In each patch of darkness he knew that one of them could be waiting and watching. The tablet under his arm was beginning to take on an unnatural weight aided by his dread imagination. At least until he saw one of

them in truth.

It was impossible to tell if it was the same one or another. He only recognized the hooded, undulating robe in a deep black space across from his own home. The face was still obscured and, despite a complete lack of wind, the folds of its mantle rippled and surged as if in a stiff breeze. He couldn't turn around this time. It watched from the alley across from his apartment complex. He had nowhere else to flee.

This is what Kate meant. They stood in the open, but no one could see them. People coming home to their families and those leaving for the swing shifts went about normally. The thing was waiting so patiently and so quietly that none noticed it. Even Collin would have difficulty noticing were he not so unnaturally drawn to where it perched among the gloom.

He swallowed his fear, feeling it catch in his throat, and pressed on. He walked more slowly, however, fearing that the thing would leap suddenly and take him away to some horrid abyss. It did something even worse. It remained unmoving, the hood turning with agonizing slowness, to watch him as he walked to his front door.

Collin closed the door behind him and retreated upstairs to his apartment. Once he was inside his meager lodgings he breathed easier. He placed the tablet on the kitchen table and threw a kitchen rag over it to cover the grotesque images. He then grabbed a bottle of Johnny Walker from a cabinet. He skipped the glass.

They're attracted like a beacon to those that know of them.

Half a bottle later he was chiding himself for being so childish. He'd listened to the doctor's foreign exploits and gotten caught up in Hughes' absurd ramblings of unspeakable things. His imagination made him see boogeymen in the shadows and made him turn tail and run like a frightened animal back to his pitiful apartment. He took a final swill and staggered off to languish in a drunken euphoria in bed.

As he lay there on his stomach, one eye blinded by the plush comfort of a pillow and the other staring lazily out the window, he reminisced on the earlier events of the day. Dr. Hughes was a stranger man than he would have guessed. What she saw in him must have ended at his archeological ventures. The man was brilliant in his field, and somewhere in the course of his travels he crossed that fine line into intellectual madness. Judging by the time he'd spent in Turkey and Southeast Asia, it was likely the damned heat and isolation.

It still didn't explain all the "missing persons" clippings he was so distraught over. It still didn't explain Kate. He wanted to piece those into the lunatic puzzle that was Myles Weyland Hughes when a sound brought him from his bed. It wasn't a door closing or glass breaking. It was feint and foreign; a sinister whisper that he would have had trouble identifying even had he not been dulled by liquor.

Collin opened the closet door and pulled out a nine-iron from a dust-covered and unused bag of golf clubs. He stumbled noisily through to the kitchen, where he thought the noise originated. Nothing looked out of the ordinary, but a fleeting movement caught his eye. He walked into the adjacent living room and found nothing. He circled back through the hallway and its joined bathroom and continued to come up empty handed. He was prepared to explain it away as drunken imaginings.

Then, he stubbed his toe on the bedframe and shouted a string of slurred curses. The pain and lack of coordination caused him to fall and bang his head on the same wooden frame as he crashed to the ground. He managed to crawl into bed, his vision clouding and closing in, when he saw one of them lurking in darkened hallway. The booze and head trauma had called back memories from his terrified flight home.

Go away. Collin thought angrily. His vision finally went black and he passed out.

Despite drinking himself into a stupor, Collin did not sleep well. His dreams were mangled with shifting appendages and gaping, tooth-filled mouths. Flowing robes threatened to suffocate him and finally plunged him into a pool of deep, black water and dragged him down until he woke in a cold sweat.

Collin looked at the clock and saw it was nearly noon. His body ached and his head pounded. Then, he remembered the robed figure haunting his own hall. His heart raced as he looked over and saw that the space was empty. He grabbed the nine-iron and checked his apartment again. Nothing was there. He saved the kitchen for last, and seeing nothing he decided to kill the hangover with bacon and eggs. He laid the club on the table and a cold feeling grabbed his insides. He looked over at the kitchen rag and recalled the tablet that was underneath. It was gone.

He threw on a coat and shoes and left the apartment. He wanted nothing more than to be out of that place. He walked the city for a while. He visited some small parks and sat listening to the activity of normal people. He knew what he had seen to be real. He was a logical man without superstition. Hughes may have been a number of things, but insane was not one of them. Kate was still missing and that which drove her to unconscionable fear was now stalking him.

They dwell among us in the dark and secret places...

Collin checked his coat. He'd left without his wallet but found a few bills in one of the pockets. The things had gone from his home, but he wouldn't go back until he had more answers, so he bought a flashlight from a small convenience store (one large enough to club someone with it if the need arose) and began his search.

Hughes' was right about the city. There were just as many forgotten places among the metal and brick hollows of New York as there were among the edges of civilization. Collin checked the neighborhoods he knew and, finding nothing, he simply began to wander. He scoured the darkest and most rotted underbellies of the metropolis. He knew in many of these areas he was putting himself at risk as he walked throughout the night.

Though a dread pall followed him wherever he went, he never once spotted another of the Descendants. He roamed into places so choked with the forgotten monuments of old New York that he couldn't see the sky and yet the horrible things remained unseen.

The weak orange glow of morning began to highlight those edges of the buildings that touched the eastern sky. Collin still had yet to make any headway. He still refused to return home, as the sharp pang of fear that pressed upon his mind had yet to dull even now.

That was when he saw them. He once again felt his gaze drawn uncontrollably towards a deep area of shadow. Once he had seen one, he began to see others. Dreadful robed figures perched among shadowy hollows like demon crows. Collin then truly recognized his surroundings. He was still in the city, but he found himself surrounded by the most derelict of environments imaginable. He had finally stumbled into the most forsaken territory of the great concrete hive; or, perhaps, it was more than consequence?

The Descendants watched him, unmoving, from their dark roosts. One of them at ground level finally turned and moved away in a gait utterly foreign to natural motion. It seemed to melt into the ground and then disappear. Collin realized his jaws were clenched, and painfully so. He looked about to see the others had all disappeared.

He ran over to where the one had seemed to descend. For once, it was no sinister mockery of physics and nature. A small, filthy set of concrete stairs led just below ground to a metal-grated door.

Its rusted hinges squealed as Collin opened it. Inside it was pitch black. He produced the flashlight from his coat and its shaft of light revealed a claustrophobic tunnel of concrete and metal pipes. It was painfully silent in the crypt-like shaft. He continued to follow it and descended several small sets of stairs that seemed to wind downward. It began to grow chill and humid.

The light finally trained on an archway at the end of a long stretch of the tunnel. A faint, yellow light flickered inside it. He approached as slowly and quietly as his feet could take him. He assumed the effort was futile, as they obviously knew he was here given their numbers outside. Regardless, he turned off the flashlight as the feint glow was enough to prevent him from tripping and guided him to the room in what secrecy he could manage.

When he reached the arch he saw that it was no longer made of dirty, grey concrete. Rather, it was carved of stone that seemed to belong to the earth itself. Inside he failed to see the source of any illumination, and yet there was the faintest of light present. He swallowed dryly when he realized the light was coming from a still pool at the center of the room.

More disturbing still was that he could not gauge the dimensions of the room. The glow only provided just enough to see the floor, also carved of ancient stone, in the immediate area around the pool. The rest was swallowed in darkness and made the confines seem to press even harder on mind and body.

He approached the pool and saw no light source under its still surface. The glow took on a sinister feel of its own when Collin realized it was coming from the water itself. He then realized that a consistent, soft sound permeated the room. It sounded like the darkness was whispering.

A rustling sounded behind him, and he turned. He nearly fell into the pool when one of them was standing

only feet from him, just inside the insidious glow. His heart pounded so loud the relentless whispering was lost to his ears. When he calmed his breathing, he spoke to it.

"Where is she?"

It did not move.

"Where is she?" he shouted, anger beginning to mingle with fear.

The creature moved toward him, and he knew if he backed away he'd plunge into the strange waters. In a moment of horror, a dry snake-like appendage came from beneath the robes. It had three chitinous claws that grabbed the hood and removed the robe from the terrible thing that hid beneath.

His scream caught in his throat. He only choked out inaudible sounds as the blasphemous being from the tablet stood before him. It was a mass of coils surrounding what looked like a single, ovular maw that was closed. Exposed and misshapen fangs of varying sizes lined the edges of the mouth.

Then the maw opened, and it was not the vicious gullet that Collin expected, but a slick membrane that slid horizontally, like a reptile's, over a single large eye. It was jaundiced and coursed with blue and red veins. The yellow iris contained three separate, elongated pupils that flicked about independently. One of them trained quickly on Collin and the other on the pool. The third continued to dart about, seeking things no mortal could see.

The mass of tentacles appeared surprisingly dry and were in constant motion. They made a soft, sickening rustling noise in their movement. It was nauseating to behold, and Collin resisted the urge to retch. One of the clawed appendages was holding the tablet that Hughes had given him. It stretched and held out the stone slab as if to give it to him. Collin looked at the horrible etchings and then back to the creature, confusion clear on his terrified face.

The Descendant edged toward him, pushing the tablet closer. When he still didn't take it, another of the clawed appendages shot from within its mass and grasped Collin by the face. The claw engulfed and suffocated him; he felt a physical and psychological pull on the front of his mind and his vision flew to the edge of the universe.

Collin saw the great, unnamable things that Hughes had mentioned. He saw a creeping, celestial amoeba that was consumed with cold intelligence disintegrating entire planets as it absorbed them whole. He witnessed unspeakable things that controlled foreign worlds beyond man's wildest ideals of universal boundaries. He then saw the Starving God, the Gnashing Wall.

He saw the Descendants in horrifying numbers, swaths of them stretching to the horizon. Their undulating bodies writhing and lashing like a blanket of angry vipers. Their hungry god moved among them, a grotesque sphere of boiling coils and puckering, fanged mouths that submerged and resurfaced among its own hideous mass.

The sea of thrashing Descendants called out to It even as It devoured them en masse. Some escaped its many jaws only to disappear and likely be crushed and mangled among its appalling mass of limbs.

When he thought he could endure no more, and felt his mind beginning to cease to function for its own defense, he began to feel his consciousness return to the here and now. But, not before he received one final glimpse of insanity: he saw that their seething coils covered the span of oceans and the land between them naught but lifeless dust and bones of humanity's despondent future. He recognized many familiar continental outlines in that final glimpse, before his vision left to the dark spaces of the upper atmosphere and beyond where the fiendish Descendants dotted the earth's atmosphere like a cloud of Stygian spores, and Collin's consciousness was finally pulled back to that whispering room.

He fell to his knees and retched over and over again as he tried to force the fetid images from his brain. When he could stand, he looked up to the Descendant still watching him with one motionless pupil. The other two darted about chaotically. A second one fixed on some distant point. A clawed appendage produced from within its hidden core the tablet of Dr. Hughes. It stretched out and produced the object for Collin's taking.

When he didn't take it, the arm stretched a little further. Finally, the thing moved closer so the tablet was nearly pressed onto Collin. He finally took it from the hideous claws and stared at it. He turned on the flashlight and looked it over. They now wanted him to bring them their offerings.

In a moment of dread curiosity, he turned the beam of light into the shadows. What he saw their pulled upon

his gut until he wanted to vomit again. The whispers that he heard coming from the dark were not what he thought. The walls...the walls were *alive* with them. Their ceaseless, countless appendages slithered about the walls in turbulent motion. Hundreds, maybe thousands strong hid in that unspeakable blackness.

Hughes' said that some unknown species was at fault for calling them here. They are now extinct and all knowledge of them gone. The Starving God would likely consume all things in time, and his brood was calling him here across the universe's vast expanse. Humanity was doomed before it even existed.

In anger, he threw the tablet to the floor. It broke into many pieces and would play a part to his own destruction, no doubt, but he would not be party to the deaths of so many others. Collin spat at the creature. Surely, it would understand his intent at that.

And understand it did. A strong, sharp set of claws gripped about his throat. He couldn't breathe and felt a warm trickle down his neck. The vicious, vengeful thing lifted him into the air above the dread water. He felt the grip release and suddenly he was falling. He hit the water and it felt wrong. It was denser, thicker than water should be, but he held his eyes open and it was clear as any spring.

He thrashed at the surface as he caught his breath, but before he could begin swimming he felt himself being dragged under. He kicked and fought against the pull, but it was slow, measured, and unyielding.

He looked below him and saw the bottom. Around him was an inky blackness that was far too large for the size of the well itself. The opening was a disc of pale light illuminating the floor directly below him.

Millions of tiny cilia rippled in waves like a disturbed pond. Strangely, they rippled inward. Collin knew that, somehow, this was the source of the ravenous potency that drew him down into the gaping depths.

He continued to kick and swim when a strange sensation caressed his skin, and then exploded into an unimaginable pain. He suddenly felt as though he were submerged in liquid glass and embalmed with molten lead. The pain of infinite and invisible cuts coursed in waves over his body.

He closed his eyes and screamed silently in that watery void. He was still being pulled ever downward. He saw the skin on his arms begin to flake and peel away. He closed his eyes and waited for oblivion. Not even that was to come swiftly.

When he no longer had eyelids to conceal the nightmare, his last vision was the bottom of that horrid well and all its contents. Piles of bones lay among the pulsating cilia, stretching out beyond the darkness of the shaft of light. On the very edge of that forsaken twilight laid skeletal remains in a familiar dress. A gold necklace with an emerald Irish cross draped across the collar bone. With what was left of him, he reached out to her. Their remains would endure here, together, albeit forever lost.

Finally, he no longer had eyes to see. He played no part in Hughes' panicked schemes, and he would not be present for or party to the vile culmination of the world's last doom and the unspeakable thing that sought to bring it. And, at last, he found her. His final moments, devoid of sight and in blinding pain, were at least an instant of ghastly closure.

The End.

CASE #31730

WHO DWELL AMONG US

BY R.S. ARCHEY



R.S. Archey is a new writer in the world of fiction. He mostly works in the areas of fantasy and horror, but also dabbles in science fiction. His self-published works include “The Seven Spires” and the “Crucible” short story series. He lives with his wife, children, and a small zoo of animals in Nevada.

author website: www.rsarcheybooks.com



The Dawn of Monsters

by Joseph V. Danoski

Physician: Dr. Lotherton
8715-AED19

#50195

CASE #: 50195



THE DAWN OF MONSTERS

BY JOSEPH V. DANOSKI

Walking with my shadow growing,
The fallen leaves beneath my feet;
Monster of my weakness showing,
My shape is shifting in the street.

Waking up from the embalming,
The autumn moon a constant friend;
Night of living not yet dawning,
When all us monsters walk again.

CASE #50195

THE DAWN OF MONSTERS

BY JOSEPH V. DANOSKI



Joseph V. Danoski lives happily on the “plains of his imagination” in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. He published his first book of poems, *Shock Waves: Letters from the Edge*, back in 1987, under his infamous pen name, Jonathan Konrad. This book is still being sold in local bookstores, and has been reviewed favorably a number of times.

Through the years, Joseph has had quite a few of his poems published in the city’s newspaper, *The Berlin Reporter*, where for a time he had a byline in its poetry corner. In 1997 he was asked by the Chamber of commerce to write something appropriate for the Berlin Centennial Celebration. After researching the history of the area and the paper-making industry, he wrote a poem titled, *The City Built from Trees*, which he was subsequently invited to read at City Hall.

Joseph is a writer of letters and essays on diverse subjects, with strong opinions on many topics; but first and foremost, a poet of horror, science fiction and fantasy. His other activities include playing music, gardening, and stargazing. Recent publications include *Penny Dreadful*, *Psychopoetica* (U.K.) *Hadrosaur Tales*, *The Quest* (India) *Black Petals*, *Yellow Mama*, and *The Horror Zine*.

Email: Dojonaki@Netscape.Net



She-Demon

by Terry Miller

Physician: Dr. Lichten
6428-SED41

#82712

CASE #: 82712



SHE-DEMON

BY TERRY MILLER

I heard her voice in the distance,
Turned, and faced her silhouette.
Then she came near to disappear,
And leave me with my cigarette.
My eyes beheld her tombstone
That lay just at my feet.
She had died right in my arms,
Something I wished to keep discreet.

My dreams are filled with memories;

Ones that wish her still alive.

My hands are stained with crimson

And feel as though still gripping knives.

I will pay this pound of flesh

And pray it adequate for remission

Of all my deeds and carnal sins.

This day my demon receives commission.

I give my life to her, it feels I have no control.

I hear her voice once more, "I long to carve your soul."

CASE #82712

SHE-DEMON

BY TERRY MILLER



Terry Miller grew up in Portsmouth, Ohio where he has spent most of his life. In the spring of 2012, he relocated to Harlan, KY. He aspires to use his love of writing to establish himself in the horror genre. A fascination with the genre began at an early age with classic 80's films and only continued grow into an appreciation for macabre art and literature.

Terry's dark verse piece "The Withering Woman" was published in Sanitarium Magazine Issue #26 which served as a rebirth of his interest and devotion to the genre. He is currently working on other poetic pieces as well as various short stories he has in development. With his creative ideas on the proverbial table, Terry's anxious to see them come to fruition.



On the.

Record



HORRIFY ME

So tell us a little bit about your business! What do you do?

We are HORRIFY ME (www.horrify.me.uk). Our job is to create stunning horror images and photography. Our main client base consists of private clients who wish to have horrific portraits of themselves as zombies, vampires and other nasty characters. We also conduct a lot of incredible artistic collaborations and jobs for magazines, book authors and advertisers. Horrify Me is an award winning photography studio based in Kent with one of the most impressive portfolios of horror images in the UK. Our images are incredible, lifelike, and finished to an exceptional high standard. We don't make Halloween party pics but authentic, terrifying, gory images of amazing quality horror.

Why were you interested in coming and being a part of Bristol Horror Con?

We are actively spreading the word about our service and horror conventions seem to be the place for it. We're well known in the horror community but it's always good to meet new friends and colleagues as well as take the business around the UK.

What types of marketing strategies do you use to get yourself out there in this arena? What makes you stand out?

Facebook is our main platform, and we do get a fair bit of our work through it. What makes us stand out is simple: We are among the best at what we do in a new, emerging market. Horrify Me is attempting to lead the way in specialised horror photography and creative image services. What's the one thing you're most looking forward to at Bristol Horror Con? Meeting new people and hopefully reuniting with some familiar faces!

Is there anyone that you're hoping to connect with? Any authors or outlets that you have your eye on?

I believe Matt Shaw is going, the extreme horror author. I am keen to meet him. Also the Evil Twins are going. I've worked with them before and loved it, so it will be great to see them again.

What types of clients do you generally attract? What do

you have to show them at the con?

My clients vary from people who just want something a bit different and unusual to hardcore horror fans, as well as scare industry professionals. I'll be showing albums of work and hopefully attracting new clients.

Have you attended any other cons this year, or are there others you are planning to attend later on in the year?

I have attended a couple of comic cons but I've made the decision this year to only attend horror cons from now on. Comic / sci-fi cons just don't seem to generate the same buzz. I don't think Dr Who fans are that turned on by erotic gore or zombies with intestines hanging from their mouths.

How do you plan to expand your business in the next year?

Not sure! This business is so new and unusual that we are pretty much making it up as we go along. We may increase advertising to get more clients or try and hook up with more industry professionals but one thing I am keen to do to raise our profile is try and get a few celebrity models in front of our camera. We've already worked with actors from Shaun of the Dead and film maker Emma Dark, which went down very well for all involved.

Tell us: do you know Sanitarium? If so, what do you think? If not, want to know a little more?

I don't know Sanitarium and yes, would love to know more.

What is the one thing you wished consumers knew about your product/business/service that you'd like them to know before attending Bristol Horror Con? What do you hope they take away after they visit you at the event?

Horrify Me is the most fun you can have on a day out. Don't take my work for that, just read our reviews! We get nothing but praise, recommendations, and 100% 5-star reviews, every time. The big secret to our success is understanding how to make the whole horror thing great fun for everyone (not something I intend to reveal to potential competitors), even on the more serious shoots. We don't take any of this for granted though, and we work very hard on every single shoot to earn those good reviews. I can easily sit and say that we are the best at what we do but that would be pretty cynical. But when every client says it, then maybe, just maybe, we are hitting our goals in all the right ways.





IN EAR ENTERTAINMENT

So tell us a little bit about your business! What do you do?

We're In Ear Entertainment. We publish audiobooks horror and science fiction authors. We work with both authors and voice actors who are starting to make a name for themselves to give them some additional income and support their development. We have also created Audiobooks on Tape, a way to get audiobooks on a physical medium once again, in this case a 4GB memory stick that is shaped like a cassette tape complete with case and cover art.

Why were you interested in coming and being a part of Bristol Horror Con?

We find conventions based around a theme, rather than a hobby (such as comic conventions) a great place to meet a wide variety of people. In one day we can meet people who like books, films, comics, writing or even just cosplay. It offers us a broader group of people to meet and talk to.

What types of marketing strategies do you use to get yourself out there in this arena? What makes you stand out?

Our Audiobooks on Tape project is our latest and best project. The feedback on the physical items has been great and everyone loves how they hint back to the old 'books on tape' audiobooks they had when they were younger.

We also have podcasted projects from a sitcom set in a small Welsh village to a non-academic discussion podcast about Shakespeare's sonnets. We are currently working on our next project which is a shared world audiobook podcast.

What's the one thing you're most looking forward to at Bristol Horror Con?

Meeting authors and readers and hearing them talk about their latest books. In fact, just talking to people in general. We love to hear people talk about something they find interesting. Passion is contagious.

Is there anyone that you're hoping to connect with? Any authors or outlets that you have your eye on?

I always keep an eye on what WolfSkullJack is up to. Her

artwork is amazing.

What types of clients do you generally attract? What do you have to show them at the con?

Generally people need to be open to something new. Audiobooks have a weird stigma attached to them where people think it 'isn't really reading'. What they don't seem to understand is that audiobooks allow you to 'read' while doing something else (walking the dog, commuting to work, cooking and so on). At the con we will be launching our latest horror audiobook *Carnie Creek*. It's a novella by a US author that has a very 90s 'high-school kids stumble in to a horror movie' vibe to it. It's read by YouTuber Brentalfloss (Also known as Brent Black).

Have you attended any other cons this year, or are there others you are planning to attend later on in the year?

We're always on the look out for other conventions but have found that more and more of them are becoming 'comic cons' which doesn't quite gel with what we do. If anyone is setting up or knows of other horror, science fiction or literary conventions, we'd love to attend.

How do you plan to expand your business in the next year?

Adding more titles to the Audiobooks on Tape site and pushing out more audiobooks.

Tell us: do you know Sanitarium? If so, what do you think? If not, want to know a little more?

We do. We met at Scardiff and you are great!

What is the one thing you wished consumers knew about your product/business/service that you'd like them to know before attending Bristol Horror Con? What do you hope they take away after they visit you at the event?

Audiobooks are great fun. There's something special about having a book read to you by someone with talent. Even if someone doesn't feel like grabbing one of our audiobooks on the day, I hope they go away intrigued by the idea and checks us out at a later date.





BARBIE WILDE

First and foremost: thank you for speaking with us! What can you tell us about your experience with the world of horror magazines? Have you done interviews similar to this before?

Yes, I've done quite a few interviews regarding *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* and for my debut dark crime novel, *The Venus Complex*, which was published by Comet Press in 2012. I've also written reviews and interviewed horror writers and artists for *Fangoria* in the last couple of years.

Congratulations on the new collection of short stories, *Voices of the Damned*, that will be making their debut this October. What has this project been like to work on and what can we expect?

I had the idea of doing a collection of my short horror stories a while ago, but I wanted to do something special. Paul Fry of SST Publications contacted me back in November 2014, complimenting me on *The Venus Complex*. He said that if I ever had a project, then to please consider his company. I'd already done a couple of reviews for SST publications: two of Daniele Serra's art books: *Veins and Skulls* (for *Fangoria*) and *I Tell You It's Love* (story by Joe Lansdale), so I was familiar with the kind of projects that SST was involved with. They specialize in doing quality full color art books amongst other things.

I wanted every story in the collection to be illustrated by a different artist. Paul liked the idea and *Voices of the Damned* was born. We got Daniele on board immediately: Dani had done the cover art for *The Venus Complex* and I adore his work. Then I thought: why not ask Clive Barker? Clive generously allowed me to use three of his artworks: one for the cover and a couple to illustrate two stories in the collection. (A big thanks to Mark Allen Miller, VP of Clive's Seraphim Films for helping coordinate this.) Then I asked Nick Percival, because I loved his work on the *Hellraiser Boom! Comics*, then Steve McGinnis, Ben Baldwin, Tara Bush and Vincent Sammy said yes. I'd worked with Eric Gross previously on the "Cilicium Pandoric", so he signed on to do the "Cilicium Rebellion" as well. I was thrilled with the results that these amazingly talented artists came back with. The illustrations in *Voices of the Damned* are so haunting

and beautiful. Combined the illustrations and the artwork with the wonderful interior and exterior design by Paul Fry and it makes one hell of a book. (Pun intended!)

People probably first recognize you as the female cenobite in Hellraiser. Are your first creative memories those of wanting to act or to write?

I've always written stories, every since I was a kid. I was an outsider (still am, really), not necessarily by choice, so that has a tendency to help develop an overactive imagination.

I knew that I wanted to be an actress when I was 12. I was cast in a school play called *The Mighty Germ* and I was a hit as a cold-plagued teacher. The audience was laughing with me, not at me, if you know what I mean, and I was hooked.

You've been on the other side of these interviews many, many times. Can you tell us a little bit about both the best and the worst interviews you've ever conducted?

I absolutely adored interviewing John Lydon (AKA Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols). He was so professional and funny. And a real good sport as well. (I interviewed him lying in a giant net – we looked like two beached tunas!) To be honest, everyone I've interviewed was marvelous in their own way: the B52s, the Sisters of Mercy, Nicolas Cage – they've all been great. I guess the person who was the least cooperative (surprisingly) was Hugh Grant, but he could have been horribly jet-lagged for all I know.

What kind of upbringing did you have? Where did you get your interest/spark in wanting to be creative in the horror space?

I had a quiet, fairly conventional upbringing, I suppose. The thing that sparked my interest in horror (and certainly my paranoia about monsters, aliens, etc.) was the Saturday Afternoon Creature Feature on TV, which my older brother insisted that I watch with him. It was watching movies like the fifties versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (I looked under the bed for pods every night for years after watching that one), *Invaders From Mars* (don't go into the basement, you'll get drilled by Martians), *The Thing From Outer Space*, etc., that made a huge impression on me. I recently tried to watch the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* again and it was really hard to look at the TV screen. (The remake with Donald Sutherland wasn't a problem for me, as I was an adult when I viewed it for the first time.)



Do you take advantage of interacting with your fans on social media? How has that changed your ability to connect with fans of your work in ways that weren't possible when you were first starting out?

Facebook and Twitter has really changed how fans interact with me and how I interact with fans. It is great and they are both excellent tools for marketing and getting in touch with people, including reviewers, etc.

However, there really isn't any like meeting fans in person. I remember the first convention that I attended and I was overwhelmed by the love and admiration of horror fans for these relatively small, cult British horror films called *Hellraiser* and *Hellbound*.

Do you have a specific time of day that you prefer to write?

Not really. I feel more energetic in the morning, but I often get my ideas right before falling asleep, which is really boring, because then I have to get up and write them down, or I'll forget them!

On that same note, do you follow any author rituals? Such as using the same font for all your work, handwriting notes, only working for a few hours, sipping tea while you write?

Not really. I do love going to cafes and writing ideas down by hand sometimes, but nowadays, those quiet moments are harder to find!

You've been involved with all vehicles of art: music, acting, journalism, writing, and more. Do you have a favorite outlet or one that you miss doing more than others?

I love the idea that writing gives me the opportunity to create worlds and characters. Although I suppose that I do miss acting, writing is my preferred mode of creativity now. (Although if someone offered me the ideal part, then I'd be in there like a shot.)

What experience from working on Hellraiser would stand out as odd to a fan of the movie?

If fans ever really knew what the Cenobites got up to behind the scenes! We all had really early calls and after hours in makeup and costume, it was inevitable that we'd have to wait around for hours to get in front of the camera. There are some behind-the-scenes videos up on Youtube of me singing songs from Cabaret to one of the bemused makeup artists and Simon "Butterball Cenobite" Bamford doing the CanCan in his costume (sans headpiece). The things we used to do to keep our spirits up were pretty hilarious.

Is there going to be a point in your career, whether it's through publishing or acting or producing, where you feel like you will have achieved everything you ever wanted?

Never. I can't imagine ever stopping what I love to do.

So when you're not busy with all of your projects, what do you like to do to unwind?

I love to unwind by watching movies or TV series. Recent favorites have been: movies: *Interstellar*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*; TV series: *Penny Dreadful*, *Damages*, [and please don't laugh] the new reboot of *Hawaii Five O* (man, I love those palm trees). And a special shout-out to the Soska Sisters as well, because I really enjoyed their prison revenge thriller, *Vendetta*.

Is there anything that scares you that you have written about in the past, or would in the future?

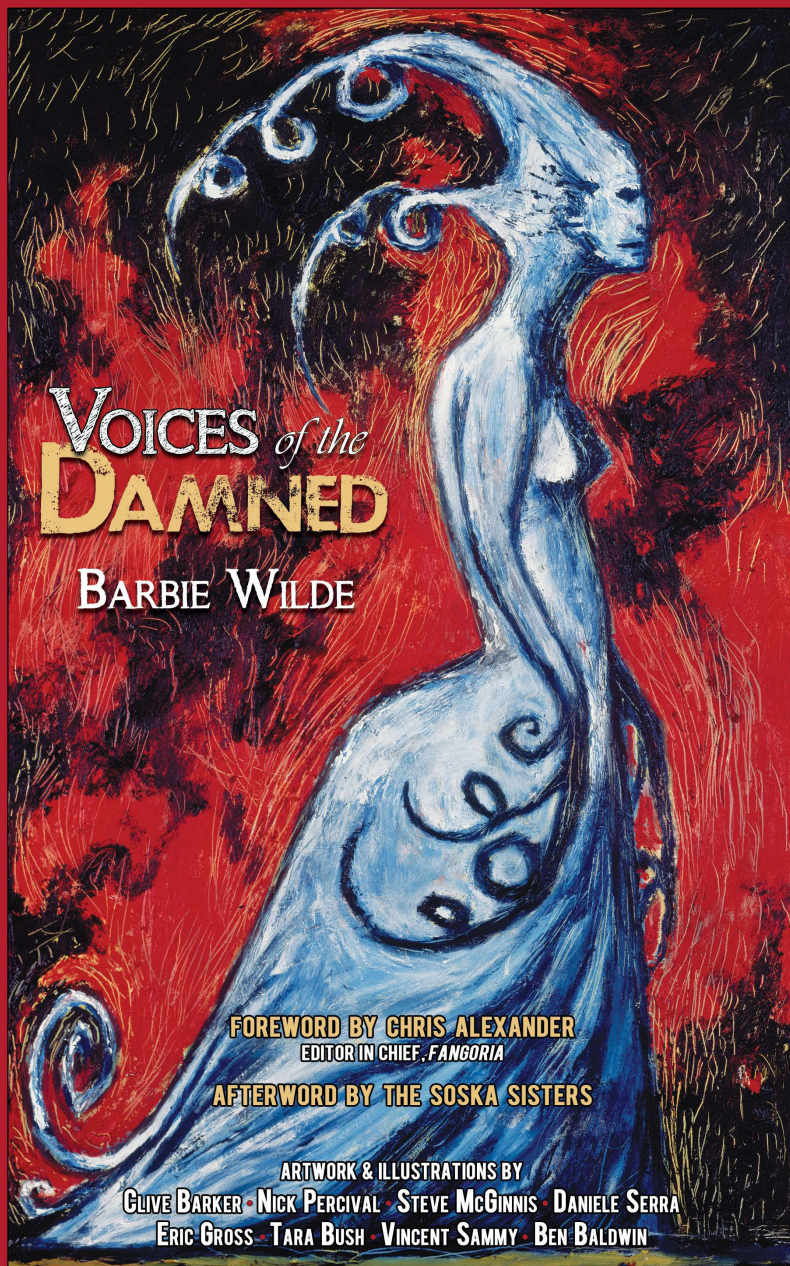
My pet fears are home invasion, a subject that I used for my short story, "Gaia" and basements, which I used for "Botophobia". (Botophobia is a morbid fear of basements.) Haven't written that spider phobia story yet!

A lot of our readers are aspiring writers, collaborators and artists in the horror industry just starting out. What advice can you give them?

My favorite quote is from the movie, *GalaxyQuest*: “Never give up. Never surrender.” It’s really hard to make a mark in any aspect of show business, or the literary world, whatever, so you just have to be determined and to use your imagination on how to reach your goals.

Of all the projects you’ve worked on, which has been the most rewarding?

I love everything that I’ve been involved in. (Except that dreadful German TV commercial back in the 80s where I had to stick my head out of a hole in the wall and then someone painted my face red. Yuk!) I suppose that *Hellbound* has ended up being very rewarding, because I met a group of people that I’m still friends with today and those connections really helped to kick-start my journey in horror writing. And writing *The Venus Complex* was wonderfully rewarding. Not only because it was the book I always wanted to write about a subject that has always fascinated me: a no-holds-barred account written from a man’s point of view of how an ordinary guy could become a serial killer, but because readers and reviewers have really responded to its “vile charms”, as Chris Alexander of Fangoria said in his introduction to *Voices of the Damned*.



VOICES OF THE DAMNED

Foreword by Chris Alexander, Editor in Chief, Fangoria

Afterword by the Soska Sisters

Artwork & Illustrations by

Clive Barker

Nick Percival

Steve McGinnis

Daniele Serra

Eric Gross

Tara Bush

Vincent Sammy

Ben Baldwin

Cover art © by Clive Barker

“Damaged people, ultraviolence, murder and explicit sex—what’s not to love about her work?”—“Bad Barbie” Featurette, Fangoria (America’s #1 Horror Magazine)

THE MORBITORIUM

CURIOSITIES, ODDITIES AND TAXIDERMISTRY



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